

## Following the Traces of Feminine Writing in Adrienne Rich's Poems

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### ABSTRACT

The phallogocentric structure of language privileges the male in construction of meaning throughout the patriarchal history which allows no place for feminine writing. Opposing what Lacan calls as phallogocentric discourse, poststructuralist feminists exhort to what Cixous terms as "écriture féminine" as the inscription of female difference in language and text. Therefore, viewing women's difference as a *source* (of imagery) rather than a point of inferiority to men, Rich rediscovers female experiences in her poems through using "écriture féminine" and thus exhibits the productivity and plurality of women's language. Hence, the present study, looking from the perspective of Cixous's "écriture féminine," aims at analyzing female modes of writing in Rich's poems. The main finding of the research is that, through using genuine female forms of expression as opposed to phallogocentric structure of expression, Rich brings into being the symbolic weight of female consciousness, illustrating the oppressive forces that obstruct female expression.

Keywords: Rich, Lacan, Cixous, écriture féminine, phallogocentrism.

### INTRODUCTION

There is a close interrelationship between the world of poetry and the real world outside, especially in the case of women's writings. Poetry for women represents the experience and the oppressions which they have undergone throughout history. Therefore, the prerequisite to understanding women's literature, its specialty and difference, is "to reconstruct its past, to rediscover the scores of women novelists, poets and dramatists whose work has been obscured by time and to establish the continuity of female tradition from decade to decade" (Showalter, 1979, p. 35). Through this method, one can trace the patterns and phases of the evolution of female tradition, which is parallel to the phases of the development of any "subcultural art", through which one can "challenge the periodicity of orthodox literary history, and its enshrined canons of achievement" (Showalter, 1979, p. 35). Such a systematic exploration of women's writing enlightens one's awareness of political, social and cultural experiences of women.

Having gone down to the depths of the wreck of the civilization, brought about by the non-inclusive male myth, and having tried to stand against the orthodox literary traditions which are mostly masculine and to create a new female myth and mode of writing, female writers like Rich turn to a better ways of knowing, that is, a totally female mode of expression.

Such manner of female writing exposes women's "courageous self-exploration." Moreover, such female writers try to "unify the fragments of female experience through artistic vision" and they focus on "the definition of autonomy for the woman writer" (Showalter, 1977, pp. 33-5).

From the 1960s onwards, women's writing starts a dynamic phase which combines the strengths of their previous conservative writings with such themes as the conflicts between women writers' love of their craft and its discrepancies with family obligations, the conflict between "self-fulfillment and duty." Moreover, in this period we confront with such concepts as "anger and sexuality," as sources of female power (Showalter, 1977, pp. 34-5). Such burst of radical themes, modes of expression and writing in women's writing, as opposed to the dominant male patterns of expression and masculine aesthetics and modes of writing, could be traced in Adrienne Rich's writing. In a society where language becomes an instrument in the hands of the males, Rich undergoes a risky project through which she evades the "discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system" and uses feminine writing or "écriture féminine" (Cixous 1975, p. 353).

### METHODOLOGY

Rhetoricians have challenged the function of language as a neutral mirror of objective reality; rather

they assert that it plays a powerful undeniable role in shaping human experiences and perceptions of the world. Having such view of rhetoricians towards language in mind, feminists consider the structure of language as being gender-based functioning both as a means of expression and repression. Lacan, utilizing Derrida's term, illustrates the phallogocentric structure of language to refer to the privileging of masculine in construction of meaning throughout the patriarchal history. Lacan believes that Western thought is based on systematic oppression of women's experience brought about by the phallogocentric structure of language which allows no place for feminine writing. Due to the control of men over their territory, according to Cixous (1975), women have been confined to live in a narrow room where they have undergone an unconscious brainwash throughout the whole history. Once they learn their name, they are also taught that "their territory is black" because they are considered to be black. Women are taught that their "continent is dark" and dangerous. That is how women's horror of their "dark" places have been internalized and at some point, as it seemed to be, eternalized. Riveting women between two horrifying myths of the Medusa and the abyss, the patriarchal society has made women to believe that theirs is too dark a continent to be exploreable. (p. 349).

Besides, patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its narrow specifications. The feminist vision has recoiled from female biology for these reasons but now, as Rich (1986) asserts, it should come to view "women's physicality as a resource rather than a destiny" (p. 188). Therefore, while phallus is a masculine metaphor in phallogocentric language introduced by Freud and Lacan, female body is the source of meaning in "écriture féminine." Going with such attitude towards language and femininity, Adrienne Rich rediscovers female experiences in her poems through using what Cixous calls "écriture féminine" or feminine writing. Through viewing women's sexual difference as a *source* (of imagery) rather than a point of inferiority to men, Rich exhibits the productivity and plurality of women's language and experience that allows another birth to the woman-within of the poet. Through using genuine female art forms which serve to subvert the phallogocentric structure of discourse, Rich brings into being the symbolic weight of female consciousness, illustrating the oppressive forces that obstruct female voice, and create a female space of expression in her texts.

Looking from the perspective of Cixous's "écriture féminine" as opposed to Lacan's phallogocentrism, the present study aims at analyzing the female modes of writing and expression in the poems of Adrienne

Rich through Cixous's idea of "écriture féminine" or feminine writing and thus subverting Lacan's phallogocentric structure of language.

## DISCUSSION

Throughout the whole patriarchy, a woman is pushed to internalize the standards of the dominant culture and to imitate its established modes of writing and behavior. Internalizing the male assumptions about female nature, women under such government try to write "equal to the intellectual achievements of the male culture" without daring to display an original, innovative and independent art (Showalter, 1979, pp. 35-6). This is what feminists like Cixous and Showalter have always tried to put under question; they believe that women "have always read *men's* writings" and their writings have always been affected and shaped by dominant masculine literary canons (Showalter, 1991, p. 21). In such a society, language becomes an instrument in the hands of the males through which they govern the forms of expression and thus silence the female for whom masculine forms of expression do not function to convey their real life experiences (Cixous, 1975, p. 353).

Although women have internalized their feminine conflicts and never directly mentioned them in their writings, they deeply feel the need for a movement beyond self-sacrifice and self-repression; they deeply feel the need for rebellion against the masculine tradition and for confrontation with patriarchal society and culture. Hence, discarding the conventional ideas of dependence that were held up for their admiration, women turn their back on the tradition in which they were nurtured. Thus, feminist writers indiscriminately abandon the old bonds—denouncing their (literary) fathers—and servitudes, demanding "self-realization", freedom of individuality and personal will. Casting away "the old robes and veils", feminist writers are determined to know and say everything, no matter how ugly and outrageous (Showalter, 1977, p. 227-8). Feeling the need to write of their own female experiences, the feminist writers like Rich aspire for a feminine mode of writing and language that stands against the "oppressor's language" and allows women to give word to their private experiences through *écriture féminine* as opposed to the established phallogocentric structure of language. This is what can be traced in Rich's revolutionary volume of poetry, that is, *Diving into the Wreck*.

### The Radical Revolutionary Rich in *Diving into the Wreck*

Rich in *Diving into the Wreck* dares to stand against what Lacan calls as "phallogocentrism" and tries to

give voice to the female experiences of different generations through *écriture féminine*. After following the tradition of her old masters and never directly identifying herself as a feminist in such conservative volumes of her poetry as *A Change of World*, Rich in *Diving* bids farewell to an old way of love and “an old grammar of loving”. Talking about her early poetry, Rich notes “I was trying, to write about the craft of poetry. But I was drawing on the long tradition of domination, according to which the precious resource is yielded up into the hands of the dominator” (qtd. in Wasley, 2000, p. 162). But Rich’s voice in *Diving* transforms to a robust voice of protest in American poetry and thus challenges the words of W. H. Auden who discovered Rich’s early poetry as portrayal of his belief in the “poetry [that] makes nothing happen” (Genoways, 2006, p. 207). Therefore, Rich in *Diving* turns her back to the former woman, in her former volumes of poetry, who was “haunted by her responsibilities as mother and wife” and was writing in phallogocentric structures accepted by her male literary supervisors. She finally finds the courage to reveal the previously hidden aspect of her writing and to free herself from the confinements of the patriarchal tradition. The “time allowed a new vision in Rich’s work as she composed subject matter previously avoided” which led to the creation of a collection of poetry filled with experiences of “real” life moving beyond the traditional forms of writing traced in her earlier collections (Riley, 2004, p. 210). Starting strong political identification with feminism, Rich in *Diving* challenges the “unfit world” which handles the male the power to control and determine what roles shall the female play and what shall not. Diving down into the depths of the wreck of her psychic and cultural past, the mission of the persona in the title poem, Rich plunges to her primal origins in order to return to the root to find the origins of such an oppressive state for women (Keyes, 1986, p. 138):

I came to explore the wreck. [...]
   
I came to see the damage that was done
   
and the treasures that prevail. [...]
   
the thing I came for:
   
the wreck and not the story of the wreck
   
the thing itself and not the myth (Rich, 1973, p. 23).

Here Rich pronounces the origins of the present oppressive status of women in the culture brought about by patriarchy which gives destructive powers to the male. Therefore, Rich (1979) believes, if women are to survive the detrimental effects of the culture in which they live, they must not only overcome the “drives” that impel them to play the roles which have been prescribed for women throughout history but also express their anger towards such a system for

imposing subservience on women throughout patriarchal history (p. 123).

Thus, the strength of *Diving* comes from Rich’s rejection of her early subservient poetry and enactment of her deep-rooted wish to explore the depths of the scars on the female body. Beginning such a mission, Rich knows that one must “reactivate the old wounds, inflame all the scar tissue, [and] awaken all the suppressed anger” (Vendler, 1993, p. 310). Rich in *Diving* explores the old wounds which infect the whole human civilization and makes them squeeze out. That is why her work “resonates with anger” especially towards the limitations brought about for women by imposing such roles as “daughter, daughter-in-law, lover, and mother” on them all throughout patriarchal history (Jasper, 2007, p. 205).

Hence, the predominant feelings exposed in this volume of Rich’s poetry are anger and hatred which are tangible even in the title of the poems included in *Diving* like “Burning Oneself In”, “Burning Oneself Out”, “The Phenomenology of Anger” which act out women’s thirst for violence that Rich could not render in her first volume of poetry. Female anger and frustration are expressed more directly in feminine writings than had been done before; women’s hostility towards their male counterparts is illustrated through “violent action” in feminine writings (Showalter, 1977, p. 160). This change of tendencies in feminine writing or what Cixous (1975) calls as “*écriture féminine*” could be evidently traced in Rich’s *Diving* (p. 353). In this volume of her poetry Rich finds the courage to abandon masculine strategies of writing in favor of direct and public confrontation with masculinity. Using strong personas with a direct voice of anger, Rich (1973) gives voice to women’s rage as a source of energy releasing women from the social norms that are imposed on them by patriarchy throughout history: “My visionary anger cleansing my sight” (p. 19). Rich believes that “anger is a creative force” that throughout history women have not been allowed to experience. Patriarchy has led women to live a life in which “their survival and self-respect have been so terribly dependent on male approval”. Thus, starting a strong political confrontation with masculine dominance, Rich calls for “the Erinyes”, the goddess of vengeance, to compensate for “the damage done to women in Western civilization in the name of reason, logic, and intellect” (Martin, 1984, pp. 197-8).

Therefore, in *Diving* Rich shows a tendency to denaturalize patriarchal hierarchy of values through transforming her poetic form and voice from “an apolitical formalist poet to that of an intensely

politicized feminist poet writing in open forms” and reflecting the suppressed conflicts within women’s lives. Thus, Rich’s rejection of the carefully crafted impersonality of her early poetry which can be traced in her first volume of poetry, as “institutionalized forms of representation [which] certify corresponding institutions of power”, is followed by an expansion of her poetic voice to include feminist issues and women’s experiences along with untraditional poetic forms for accommodating such issues which formalism cannot fully render (Strine, 1989, p. 28).

“The Primary Ground,” which is a poem in *Diving*, elucidates the argument in a perfect way. The poem deals with the stifling effects of women’s subservience to male-defined roles, which is what Rich herself did through her submissive poetic craft in her first period of writing. The poem, as an elaboration of Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, overtly reveals the effects of overpowering male egoism on submissive women in particular, Mrs. Ramsay being an enlightening example of, and “its far-ranging destructive consequences for society in general”. Besides, the looseness of the structure of verse form intrudes on the tranquility of the family dinner scene in Mrs. Ramsay’s house which is also further undercut by the persona’s rendering of the situation as “this sin of wedlock” that forces the woman to deny an essential part of her Self in conforming to her husband’s expectations (Strine, 1989, pp. 29-30). “The Primary Ground”, thus, expands Rich’s feminist criticisms which she left unsaid in the poems included in her early volumes of poetry such as the poem “An Unsaid Word.” The following lines portray an image of Mrs. Ramsay’s “twin sister”, as her wild unsubmissive side that is doomed to live in exile and that, like Bronte’s “madwoman in the attic”, is speechless (Keyes, 1986, p.146):

your wife’s twin sister, speechless  
is dying in the house  
You and your wife take turns  
carrying up the trays,  
understanding her case, trying to make her  
understand (Rich, 1973, p. 39).

Rich’s emphasis on the speechlessness of the twin sister refers to one of the central themes in her new poetry. After her first volume of poetry, Rich has unlearned the speechlessness of her early poetry; therefore, in contrast to the subservient and speechless persona of her first volume, Rich not only articulates her own already suppressed and unsaid words but also, criticizing women’s complicity with patriarchy through their speechlessness, does everything in her power to transform other women’s silence into speech (Keyes, 1986, p. 147).

“The Primary Ground”, thus, condemns “repression of risks” on the side of women which is brought about by the force of patriarchy on women, in this case women like Mrs. Ramsay and her twin sister, and men’s deceptive care for women, in this case Mr. Ramsay who cares for the dying sister who functions as the representative of women’s repressed self (Templeton, 1994, p. 46). Accordingly, giving the example of Woolf’s Mr. Ramsay, Showalter (1979) notes that what women have found hard to take in such male characters is their self-deceptive care and their pretense to objectivity. The male has always dominated the female in every aspect of her life and that is the reason for which in women’s writings “the complacently precise and sympathizing male has often been the target of satire, especially when his subject is woman” (p. 24). “The Primary ground,” at the same time that questions women’s submissiveness to the male, also questions such men’s as Mr. Ramsay’s surface pretense to objectivity and innocence.

Similarly, men’s egoism and superficial pretense to objectivity is the target of Rich’s criticism in “Meditations for a Savage Child” as well. As representative of all male supporters’ self-deceptive care and pretense to objectivity, Dr. Itard’s care for the child (symbolizing women) through his male thread is severely criticized in the poem. Hence, the poem is “about the use that the male artist and thinker— in the process of creating culture as we know it— has made of women in his life and work and about a woman’s slow struggling awakening to the use to which her life has been put” (Keyes, 1986, pp. 144-5). “Meditations” draws a parallel between Dr. Itard’s efforts to civilize the savage child and those of men to control women. Therefore, the child, for his vulnerability to his scientific supporters and for his resistance to their dominating social roles, becomes a symbol representative of all kinds of victims under patriarchy: “*You have the power/in your hands and you control our lives*” (Rich, 1973, p. 62). Thus, through the image of a savage child, the poem discloses Rich’s disgust of the patriarchal system of education and childrearing. It is as if Rich, having been brought up under such an educational system by her male masters including her father who taught her to “write letters copying out [such male writers’ works as] Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*” (Valentine, 2006, p. 222) in her first period of writing, is now in her feminist period of writing portraying the use to which her life has been put in her first period of literary creation. Rich in *Diving* is trying to articulate those unsaid words, which she conservatively left unarticulated in her early volumes of poetry, through female writing.

Therefore, the real anger of the poem is targeted towards parents, as the original educators and governors, for creating scars on women's bodies. Rich in the following lines, taken from "Meditations", reflects the "self-serving foundations of patriarchal language and social values" imposed on women through patriarchal education. (Strine, 1989, p. 37) Just like the persona of "Diving into the Wreck," that is the title poem, who diving into the wreck of civilization carries such tools as language saying "[t]he words are purposes/the words are maps" (Rich, 1973, p. 23), the speaker in "Meditation" reveals the capacity of language to "inscribe, to preserve and to (mis)guide" (Smith, 2009, p. 75). Here in the case of "Meditations," the phallogocentric language, which is imposed on the speaker, misled her into speaking with an alien language and caring for alien "objects of *their* caring": (emphasis added)

In their own way, by their own lights  
they tried to care for you  
tried to teach you to care  
for objects of their caring: [...]  
to teach you names for things you did not need  
[...]  
to teach you language:  
the thread their lives  
were strung on (Rich, 1973, pp. 55-6).

It seems as if Rich here is talking to her father who, supervising her education, led her to care for the things he cared for through assigning her the books of the writers whom he "cared for" and imposing their manner of writing on her writing which suppressed the voice of the real Rich. Through using *écriture* feminine, Rich gives voice to female existence; the child's scars, which bear witness to the child's "buried pain", are symbolic of Rich's pains as a child and as an early female writer who could not openly articulate her criticisms against such governing educational system which rendered her and other female poets speechless: "when I try to speak/ my throat is cut" (Rich, 1973, p. 56). These scars, as Rich describes them a "hieroglyph for a scream" (Rich, 1973, p. 56), become a metaphor for the violence done to the wild woman poet for embedding silence in her and also for making her to use imposed forms of learning and expression which fail to adequately render her meanings and finally result in an "obliteration of her voice" and identity as a woman. (Yorke, 1997, p. 52) Besides, in the bold rebelliousness of the savage child, who does not care for the objects of the civilized people's caring, Rich finds the unruliness which she and all other women must have shown under patriarchal education. Rich, "scarred by that process of socialization and nurture" under patriarchy, now in *Diving* calls for "re-education" which is one of the

characteristic features of radical feminism (Vendle, 1993, pp. 305-10).

Rejecting her early subservient poetry which defines female in terms of the masculine norms and values communicated through patriarchal educational system, Rich in *Diving* turns to define the human in terms of the female. This is what Cixous's *écriture* feminine demands from the female writers who abandon the conservatism imposed on them by patriarchy. Women have traditionally been considered as "sociological chameleons" who have historically been allowed only to adopt lifestyle, class and culture of their male counterparts. Hence, refuting masculine culture, women in their feminine writing form a subculture, within the larger framework of a whole society, unified by common values and experiences making their way for direct self-expression. Emblematic of women's writing during this period is, therefore, the presence of fantasies of Amazon Utopias, that is, perfect female societies. Such fantasies of female utopias function as visions of a flight from male dominated world to a culture defined in opposition to male tradition (Showalter, 1977, p.159).

Such images of strong bonds within female subculture appear abundantly in Rich's poetry in her feminist period of writing. Rich not only criticizes the burden of masculine forms and tendencies on female writers but also breaks out of the patriarchal boundaries, creating a bond with other women (writers). Illustrating such tendency of Rich's, the poems of *Diving* are filled with the lives of both the oppressed and rebellious women such as Marie Curie, Elvira Shatayev, Willa Cather, Emily Dickinson, Audre Lorde, Rich's mother, her mother-in-law and her grandmothers. Such a tendency of Rich's displays her "deeply held belief in the necessity for bonding or community among women" and the necessity for building an Amazon Utopia, a no-man's land free from all oppressions (Bennett, 1990, p. 226). Through such images Rich calls "for a female bonding that will recognize the strength and diversity of women's powers" (Michailidou, 2006, p. 42).

Rich in *Diving* shows her belief in the fact that there is something to be born in women and she loves this incipience. In a poem with the same title, "Incipience," after exploring the primal and prehistoric origins of patriarchy and the ways through which this system of government imposes its power on women, Rich points to the urgency of constructing a female community in order for women to be able to express their true power, which has been suppressed under the power of patriarchy, "like Dickinson's

dormant volcano” (Templeton, 1994, p. 53). “Incipience” ends with an image of women, in companionship, as exiled survivors escaping men’s violence. In this image women appear

Up the hill  
Hand in hand,  
Stumbling and guiding each other  
Over the scared volcanic rock (Rich, 1973, p. 12).

escaping to the imaginary, the imaginary world of Amazon Utopia of female community free from all male oppressions and open to ecriture feminine which challenges women’s inferiority imposed on women’s minds throughout history by patriarchal system of thought. She aspires for a time when women and mothers can have their own lives and can fully live their lives as their own selves. She believes that “the cathexis between mother and daughter [here represented in the images of women hand in hand seeking their freedom from the bonds of patriarchy]—essential, distorted, misused—is the great unwritten story.” Such comment on the status and relationship of women in patriarchy challenges women writers to fill the “clearing” which she has made (Randall, 2004, p. 202).

### **A Genuinely Female World of Ecriture Feminine in *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far***

Throughout the whole patriarchy, the male has been privileged in construction of meaning and modes of expression through the phallogocentric structure of language which was imposed upon female writers like Rich. According to Cixous, a fear has been internalized in women throughout patriarchal history with regard to writing of themselves since theirs is a “dark continent.” Thus, women have been drawn to use a phallogocentric discourse which is inadequate and even repressing for women to express their female experiences. The imposed phallogocentric speech pattern used by women exhibits their powerlessness and inferiority. Thus, women need to make their own language through changing the present phallogocentric language and adopting a more powerful speech pattern that allows them to express their real feeling. A woman, Cixous (1975) insists, “must write of herself and her body to break from the phallogocentric system.” Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, as mothers of poststructuralist feminist theory, consider women as trapped in their own bodies by a language that does not allow them to express themselves. Hence, they exhort to a feminine mode of writing or what Cixous terms as “écriture feminine” as the “inscription of female body and female difference in language and text” (p. 347). On the other hand, feminists like Showalter (1981)

also emphasize that a “literature which is always pulling down blinds is not literature. All that we have ought to be expressed— mind and body— a process of incredible difficulty and danger”. Women should not stop on working within the limits of male discourse and their accepted manners of writing (pp. 191-3). Female writing, Showalter (1979) asserts, cannot and should not go “forever in men’s ill-fitting hand-me-downs”. Women’s literature must free itself from the accepted male models of criticism and guide itself by its own impulses (p. 37).

Through feminine writing, female writers begin to develop a new manner of writing, insistently female, which “celebrates a new consciousness”. Through ecriture feminine women let go of the male and rather stick totally to their own female experiences and values trying to “unify the fragments of female experience through artistic vision” (Cixous, 1975, pp. 240-3). Showalter (1977), quoting Woolf who points to feminine writing, elaborates more on this attitude of female writing saying that “it is courageous; it is sincere; it keeps closely to what women feel. It is not bitter. It does not insist upon its femininity. But at the same time, a woman’s book is not written as a man would write it”. When writing about female experiences through feminine writing, women look at men as outsiders. They consider men’s writings as “sterile, egocentric, and self-deluding” and believe that the entire literary tradition, which men had a monopoly over, has misinterpreted feminine reality. Therefore, female writers try to present female reality as it really is not as it has already been presented by male literary writers and critics (pp. 240-3).

Hence, Rich in *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far*, moving towards female aesthetics through feminine writing or ecriture feminine, turns to redefine the female. In this volume she tries to speak of women, either women of consequence or anonymous ones, as they themselves would like to be heard. The fact that she aspires to redefine Dickinson and claim for her, as a female writer’s, already trampled rights is emblematic of such a direction in Rich’s writing. Rich in her *A Wild Patience*, trying to protect Dickinson from interpretive comments by all scholars who claim to know her, sets to represent Dickinson with her own words as a female writer not as she is defined and interpreted by the male critics. Thus, in “The Spirit of Place” Rich addresses Dickinson to rescue her from all intrusions and her memory from the oversimplified and trivialized picture that the male experts have created:

with the hands of a daughter I would cover you  
from all intrusion even my own  
saying rest to your ghost with the hands of a  
sister I would leave your hands

open or closed as they prefer to lie  
 and ask no more of who or why or wherefore  
 with the hands of a mother I would close the door  
 on the rooms you've left behind  
 and silently pick up my fallen work (Rich, 1981,  
 p. 43).

Not letting the truths of women's lives, including that of Dickinson, to be obliterated again by the patriarchy, Rich calls for pure female aestheticism as it existed in the past and as it still dwells in the hearts of women not as it is presented by patriarchy.

Rich's poems in *A Wild Patience* display a call back for women's self-representation and self-creation, characteristic of *écriture féminine*. Rich notes that we must return to what has been lost in women's history, "the lost collection" (Rich, 1973, p. 14), therefore, having read the "book of myths/ in which our names do not appear" (p. 14) in *Diving* in which she finds women excluded in patriarchal myth, Rich in *A Wild Patience* turns towards nurturing a female myth in her new poetry. For this purpose she first starts with retelling historical misrepresentation of women through patriarchal media. Rich believes that the images of women delivered through history by medium of "textbooks, museum labels and cultural myths" (p. 14) are false images. That is why she asserts that women must be interpreters, participants and practitioners of their history and myth rather than being merely detached observers who fail to claim their rights. Thus, in *A Wild Patience* Rich claims authority for women, a process which involves acceptance of "incompleteness of our historical circumstance". Such a process is evidently traceable in "Turning the Wheel"; in section three of "Turning the Wheel", entitled as "Hohokam", which is named after a prehistoric tribe that mysteriously disappeared from the desert, Rich criticizes the label of the museum of Hohokam—"those who have ceased to be"—since it indirectly dismisses the existence of such a tribe, as female myth and aesthetic is totally dismissed, rather than "imagin[ing] its reality" (Rich, 1981, p. 57) Templeton (1994) notes that Rich is referring to the fact that history has "banished the Indian woman's ghost and irrevocably erased the traces of her historical reality". Therefore, subversive to the elimination of women's myth and tradition from the face of history, Rich in *A Wild Patience* recollects women's real history and myth. In this volume she tries to "demystify false images of the past and false representations of women's lives", which was brought about by male agents, and to posit female ideals as more valid than the patriarchal ideologies by displacing female myths which are prototypical rather than archetypal, that is, a

repetitious form of meaning recurring across cultures and throughout history. Thus, Rich in *A Wild Patience* brings to the fore the lost facts of women's history and myth, making a "self-made, provisional framework" (p. 93).

Hence, Rich's focus on the female is now inspired by "mythmaking". Such an attitude of Rich's in *A Wild Patience* could be traced in the sixth section of "Turning the Wheel" where Rich, having discovered the effects of colonization on the land she journeys to in this poem, turns to a goddess, a shamaness, who functions as a female artist (Keyes, 1986, p. 198):

If she appears hands ringed with rings  
 you have dreamed about, if on her large fingers  
 jasper and sardonyx and agate smolder  
 if she is wearing shawls woven in fire and blood  
 [...]
 if she sits offering her treasures by the road  
 look at her closely if you dare (Rich, 1981, p. 57).

Giving a vision of a goddess, Rich tries to focus on how "Unborn sisters" will see her, and female writers like her, while developing the new female tradition. Conjecturing the appearance of the goddess in these lines, Rich asks us to acknowledge her and be brave enough to look at her in the eye and tell the unborn girls how she looks like in order to make her recognizable for them as well since she is the ancient goddess, the Great Earth Mother, the essence of the female which dwells in every woman. In other words, truthfully conceiving the shamaness, Rich "revises and revitalizes" historical and mythological concepts (Langdell, 2004, pp. 153-4).

"Turning the Wheel" displays Rich's passionate belief in the value of women's lives and art and the everlasting mystery of female principle. In this poem Rich, focusing on the "feminine mythic energy" especially in sections with even numbers, turns to "emblems of mythic feminine power" as it existed in American Southwest: the burden baskets of the "young woman's puberty dances"; the Colcha embroidery representing "our ancient art of making out of nothing"; an "apparition" of the female power; and the Grand Canyon as "the female core/ of a continent" in sections two, four, six and eight respectively. These emblems of feminine power, all put together, develop a woman-centered vision in Rich's poetry in this volume brought about by her feminine writing (Werner, 1988, p. 156).

Such images of female spaces formerly appeared in her *Diving* but at that time, though she showed her desire for such utopian societies, she doubted the

possibility of getting there. Rich (1975) herself affirms this idea when she said "I absolutely cannot imagine what it would be like to be a woman in a non patriarchal society. At moment I have this little glimmer of it. ... But it is very rare that I can imagine even that" (p. 151). But Rich's doubt and uncertainty about the possibility of creating a no-man's land turns to certainty in her feminine writing with her concentration on a woman-centered alternative to patriarchy and her public advocacy of a separatist vision in *A Wild Patience*. "Culture and Anarchy", for instance, actualizing the long-run dream of a no-man's land, ends with a celebration of a woman-centered vision taken from Elizabeth Cady Stanton's letter to Susan B. Anthony: "we are one in aim and sympathy/and we should be together" (Rich, 1981, p. 15).

Thus, Adrienne Rich's poetry "is an astonishing chronicle of how it has been for her to be alive right now, moment to moment" (Seidman, 2006, p. 229). Through her poetry, she proves that there exists the possibility of bringing about change by creating poetry that "evolves" with each new volume of her poetry "from strict formalism to angry free verse to a less confrontational, but no less urgent, optimism about the possibility of change" in women's state in patriarchy (Nichols, 2012, p. 110). Having undergone the conservative manner of writing which could be traced in her first volume of poetry and the rebellious feminist period of writing in her *Diving*, Rich now in *A Wild Patience* uses feminine writing and "turn[s] within" (Showalter, 1977, p. 240). Turning to pure female aestheticism, Rich does not merely rise against the masculine (literary) dominance as she did in her radical feminist period of writing in *Diving* rather she looks at women's texts and uses them as sources of power, as it is evident in the extract given above. Through these texts Rich creates a female utopia or a woman-identified text in *A Wild Patience* which allows women to speak as they themselves would like be heard. Such texts, which Rich symbolically refers to, are the only places where women are allowed to turn within themselves for sources of power as opposed to the oppressive male powers that has already dominated their whole lives.

## CONCLUSION

Having been educated under the supervision of a male-oriented system of education, Rich starts her literary mission as a conservative formalist following masculine aesthetics in *A Change of World*. In this phase of her writing, Rich does not dare to disobey the masculine aesthetic preferences. But gradually she finds the courage to break the bonds of traditional modes of expression and to question male dominated structures in the content of some of her poems in

*Diving into the Wreck*. In this radical feminist volume of her poetry, Rich mounts an overt radical protest against the dominating masculine structures which suppressed female power throughout the whole history. Rich in this volume of her poetry changes to a disenchanting questioner who draws on the necessity of reinventing cultural standards in feminist terms. Finally, having been frightened by the perspective of a feminist art which, challenging the masculine forms, walks on deadly borders, Rich in her last phase of literary career in *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* lets go of the male and rather turns to genuinely female aesthetics and feminine writing, calling for a purely woman-centered vision and a genuinely female art form in her poetry.

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# Suffrage Movement and the Subversion of the ‘Juridico-Discursive’ Power in the Victorian Period: Elizabeth Robins and The Concept of ‘New Women’

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the socio-historical subversion of ‘juridico-discursive’ power in the late Victorian period. It briefly investigates the rise of the British suffrage movement and highlights the role of ‘suffrage drama’ as its social apparatus. The authors demonstrate how suffrage artists, especially the playwright/actress Elizabeth Robins, acted against the dominant patriarchal hegemony and were in frontline of social uprisings. It is argued that ‘Suffrage drama’ as a ‘place of tolerance’ functioned as an antithesis to the mainstream theatre and challenged the conventional dramatic forms practiced prior to its birth. Suffrage drama provided a space for women to have their collective voice heard in a social and political context in the early Victorian era. Elizabeth Robins, mostly acknowledged for enacting women heroines of Ibsen’s plays, became an invaluable inspirational figure for suffrage women as she was the actress in whom the strong concept of the ‘New Woman’ was incarnated.

Keywords: Suffrage Movement, Elizabeth Robins, Suffrage Drama, Foucault, Ibsen.

## INTRODUCTION

Although making few references to women, the poststructuralist Michel Foucault (1926-1984) tremendously inspired feminist scholars to question about the dominant power, body, gender, and sexual relations. Gender theorists such as Judith Butler (1956) heavily drew from his hypothesis that body and sexuality are social/cultural constructs that are manipulated via sets of apparatuses.<sup>1</sup> In *The History of Sexuality, Vol 1* (1976), while delineating the development of sexuality in European culture, Foucault asserts that sexuality is defined throughout a sets of repressive laws and limits – what he calls the juridico-discursive power - that ruling people objectify.<sup>2</sup>

In the following paragraphs, we provide an analysis of how women artists of suffrage movement attempted to subvert the contemporary juridico-discursive power with unscrupulously operating against the artistic hegemony of the early Victorian period. The term ‘artistic hegemony’ is utilized as a parallel concept for ‘cultural hegemony’.<sup>3</sup> Women’s challenging of artistic hegemony (developed consciously or unconsciously, deliberately or accidentally) occurred for the first time, as a collective movement, in the early twentieth century and put an end to the socially descending ‘juridico-discursive’ power.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the history, ruling classes always wanted to use Art as one of their controlling apparatuses, what Marxists call ‘superstructure’. However, the intrinsic nature of Art is irrepressible and it is why it

<sup>1</sup> Feminist also found Foucault’s theories restrictive in some places as it makes social agents equal with docile entities, but dealing with this account is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> It should not be neglected that Foucault makes it clear that discourse is much more insidious than legal precepts and works through regimes of knowledge, not statutes. However, for simplification of argument the authors suffice to generalize them as sets of laws and prohibitions.

<sup>3</sup> In Marxism, specifically in theories of Italian Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), cultural hegemony refers to the domination of socio-cultural norms exerted by ruling class on a society.

<sup>4</sup> Since the Enlightenment period, women tried to oppose the oppressive patriarchy more systematically with their writing. Maybe the most well-known treatise is from Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792).

has mostly been on the side of repressed people. Relevantly, during British suffrage movement, women utilized Art, that is drama and theatre, for the first time in women's history to publically criticize the oppressions on them.<sup>5</sup>

In Victorian England, women centered their political activities around establishing women organizations and debating over the concept of disenfranchisement. In 1832, the extension of the ballot "had happened over the Household Franchise Bill, and since then women had become involved politically in social affairs" (Pankhurst, 2010, p. 10). It was not until 1872 that various women groups united and worked as a collective force in the UK's political milieu. Women organizations joined together and formed a constitutional campaign named 'The National Society for Women's Suffrage' led by Lydia Becker (1827-1890). This campaign began to agitate for 'votes for women' in a "culture that was not ready to see women participating equally with men in the political arena" (Risk, 2012, p. 385). With the pursuit of universal suffrage, women were at the same time pursuing social independence, college education, widespread national health reform, equal job opportunities, and most importantly equal pay, which could in turn free them from home imprisonment. In the Victorian society women were limited still in their private spheres and were not accepted in public areas.

In the late nineteenth century, the generic belief was that "the family is woman's proper sphere." (Van, 1999, p. 44).<sup>6</sup> This polarity pushed women into disappearance from social context and operated, in Foucault's wordings, "as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know" (Foucault, 1978, p. 4). This denigrating feeling of non-existence finally provoked resistance among the Victorian women and made them seek for "places of tolerance" in order to openly express their discontents. At this status, women needed "nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an eruption of speech" to achieve their goals (Ibid, 5). Foucault maintains that desire (suffrage) exists when there is a despotic power (male oppression). This 'juridico-discursive' conception of repressive power

restricts people to pursue their goals and limits them to the pre-defined roles. This primarily made the women unable to gain suffrage through the legislation.<sup>7</sup> Suppression increased 'discourse' on prohibitions, and these discourses brought about the outlets. Foucault calls the practitioners of these outlets 'perverts' and the outlet itself 'perversion'. Perversion is one of the main consequences of exerting juridico-discursive power and will result in the revolutionary outburst overthrowing the dominant power. In Britain, this outlet to gain suffrage had two major wings: the *suffragists* and the *suffragettes*.

### ESTABLISHED OUTLETS FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE REPRESSION: NUWSS AND WSPU, THE "OTHER VICTORIANS"

In 1897, Millicent Fawcett united many local suffrage groups in United Kingdom and formed the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). The members of this union, known as suffragists, were mostly from middle-class women. They hoped that by smart negotiations, they could convince politicians to give them social rights including suffrage. They believed that by any other kinds of discourse, [e.g. violent protests and hostile demonstrations], women would only represent themselves irresponsible and hysteric. Their semi-conservative strategies helped them to recruit male members and gradually progress in their aims.

On the other side were Suffragettes who were part of NUWSS until 1903. However, with the leading of Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, the Suffragettes splintered off the NUWSS and established the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). This organization, as Sheila Stowell points out, "offered feminists a new militant image that helped to spur women of all classes, talents, and occupations to renew political and social action" (Stowell, 1992, p. 1). Suffragettes, who were mostly from working-class women, believed that they could not achieve their goals by respectable and gradualist tactics. With their motto "deeds not words", they started to practice militant methods in their campaigns.<sup>8</sup> Their extremist approach and political agitation caused many suffra-

<sup>5</sup> Before this movement, there were women dramatists, especially in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, but they were more cautious in their narratives and even wrote sometimes in pseudonyms.

<sup>6</sup> Of course the concept of two spheres dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century; however, women's sphere was still defined with their role of motherhood and housekeeping. It was not until suffrage movement that this polarity was openly questioned.

<sup>7</sup> Foucault clarifies that power does not simply come down from above, and all power patterns cannot be recognized as dominant-dominated (male/female), rather power associations appear at all levels of society irrespective of the dominant powers. Although it is likely to pinpoint schemes and policies in power relationships, there are no particular subjects exercising this power. There is a prudence and reasoning behind power relationships, but there is no furtive group or intelligence directing these relationships (see Foucault 1978, p. 94).

<sup>8</sup> For more on this see Purvis and Holton (2000).

gettes land in jail. They violently pursued the right to vote as they believed the right to vote was their "only weapon to bring about the social legislation" (Purvis, 2002, p. 79). The Suffragettes' radical actions overshadowed other liberal activists' strategies. Their civil disobedience and militant strikes made headlines in medias. Although NUWSS and WSPU later fragmented into multiple groups with opposing tactics and differing approaches, they had one shared goal: women's freedom, which was foreseeable according to Foucault's theory of repression. However, as historian Diane Sainsbury asserts that "a key ingredient in the suffrage movement's success was its vigorous lobbying activities" (Sainsbury, 1999, p. 70).

Women's movement in this era had three major prongs: first, they demonstrated and delivered public speeches. Second, they published their own independent newspapers and journals, including *Votes for Women*, *The Suffragette*, and *Britannia*. Third, they wrote and performed suffrage drama. All these strategies were in contradiction with the fostering aims of the dominant political system. Riots and demonstrations caused distracting seizure though for a short time. Growing unrest, both in numbers and intensity, accumulated a new identity and challenged the dominant system. Many of the suffragettes were arrested during these demonstrations. Between 1906 and 1914, as Diane Atkinson observes, "over a thousand suffragettes served their sentences in Holloway [Prison]" (Atkinson, 1988, p. 95). Many have gone on food strikes and were forced-fed. Journals and theatres, by covering the news and promoting the movement's demands, helped in re-identification of women in this period.

Women in the context of suffrage movement did not have enough power and strong lobbies to produce feminist plays in mainstream theatre, simply because the people in charge were mostly men who managed theatres. Women were only utilized in theatrical environments in places where men wanted them mostly as actresses. And female acting was for a long time mostly associated with prostitution. Indeed, "the term public woman," as Angela V. John writes, "was used interchangeably for performer and prostitute" (John, 1995, p. 19). Moreover, by the choice of costume, gesture, and mise en scene, women would become the direct target of male gaze. By equating actresses with prostitutes, their social entity was both manipulated and repressed. They were inappropriately misrepresented in contrast to shiny masculinity. As Holton puts it, "such forms of masculinism rest upon a more active resort to sexual stereotyping than those characterized by gender blindness. They work by allowing women to take center stage, but only by infantilizing them or giving them roles drawn

from farce, the comic postcard and the clinic. They rely, too, of course, on an enormous degree of generalization" (Holton, 2011, p. 832). Foucault maintains that power acts as a kind of law that regulates how females should be assumed and understood, and this is why he believes that juridico-discursive power socially structures people. For Foucault, "the pure form of power resides in the function of the legislator; and its mode of action with regard to sex is of a juridico-discursive character" (Foucault, 1978, p. 83). Power is enforced as law (discourse of knowledge); the more it is violated, the freer violators will be. In such situation, one of the elementary practices of marginalized groups [women] is creating new form of artistic presentation in independent spaces. Women activists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, who could not represent themselves in mainstream theater, decided to express themselves via suffrage drama in alternative theatres.

#### **SUFFRAGE DRAMA: ELIZABETH ROBINS, WWSL AND AFL**

Drama, literature, music and more generally 'Art' has the power to question, answer, solve, create problem, make or calm down a crisis. Either it solves the internal conflicts instantly as Aristotle believes via catharsis, or will encourage the audience to go and solve it outside theatres as evokes Brecht's epic theatre. Likewise, Suffrage drama played an incredibly important role in suffragists' achievement. Suffrage drama, as a general term, refers to a form of dramatic literature which emerged during the suffrage movement. Suffrage dramas are limited to the time span of 1907 to 1914. Suffrage theatre attempted to deconstruct the cliché images of female sentimentality and irrationality, and rebuild strong responsible 'beings'. Suffrage dramas were mostly based on female protagonists who could persuade the anti-suffragist figures by influential convincing speeches to support women rights. Nonetheless, critically speaking, the suffrage drama, did not dissociate totally from bourgeois ideology. Although many women from working-class groups were involved in demonstrations and political crises, the characters represented on the stage were mostly from the middle-class women (Joannou, 2010, p. 188). Also the settings, as in Elizabeth Robin's *Votes for Women*, would be a middle-class family house with bourgeois lifestyle, dialects, and attitudes.

The playwright Elizabeth Robins (1862-1952) played an important role in creating and solidifying the suffrage drama in the early years of the twentieth century. The suffrage drama in form and content

pursued the realist school of dramatic literature. However, it functioned as a propaganda in favor of women's rights. The plays within this genre usually consist of all-female cast and all-female production staff. As Ann Heilmann asserts, "by making women characters the focus of the narrative voice, writers first and foremost appealed to their contemporary readers to adopt a (multiplicity of) female viewpoint(s) as opposed to the conventional male vantage point which shapes so much even of oppositional Victorian literature" (Heilmann, 2000, p. 9). Suffrage drama became quite popular and prevalent in two artistic communities in early twentieth century: Women Writers' Suffrage League, and the Actresses' Franchise League, both founded by Elizabeth Robins. It was from the heart of these leagues that first wave of feminist theatre had been born. Among the prominent members of these two leagues were Ellen Terry, Edith Craig, Kitty Marion, and Elizabeth Robins. Robins became quite well-known for enacting women in Ibsen's plays in London.

The style of suffrage drama, and its concept of "New Woman," were direct influences of Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906). Ibsen, whose plays were extendedly performed on British stage at that time, had already introduced the concept of 'new woman' to the world with his major plays, *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Hedda Gabler* (1891). *A Doll's House* manifested a vital step in the depiction of modern women. Although Ibsen argued that his play is not a direct treatise on women and their issues, "the timing of the English production turned it into something more [feminist]" (John, 1995, p. 53). Unlike suffrage feminists, Ibsen never accepted that his plays were written for the sake of women's emancipation and advancement of their social circumstances though his plays were and are mostly used and quoted on feminist grounds. The feminist theatre primarily was fueled with the energy of the rebelling characters like Nora, Hedda, and Hilda. Interestingly all these characters became well-known to the world and British stage by their impersonation by Elizabeth Robins. Robins dedicated herself to Ibsen's drama and non-commercial theatre before turning to the writing career. A prolific writer, Robins mainly addressed different recent women issues including "women's sexual passion in *Alan's Wife* (1893), conversion to the WSPU in *The Convert* (1907), and pacifism in *Ancilla's Share* (1924)" (Scott 1995, 62). Robins retired from acting before 1900 and devoted herself to the suffrage movement and started to write pro-suffrage plays and novels including the play *Votes for Women* (1907), "the longest and the most ambitious of the suffrage plays" (Joannou 2010, 188), and the novel *The Convert* (1907).

What can be acknowledged in Robins's written works is that Ibsen's footprints can be vividly perceived here and there in her texts. Among prominent features of Ibsen's which are apparent in Robins' works are his use of double-density dialogue see (Meyer, 1985), the development of an introspective gesture, known as the autistic gesture (Gay Gibson Cima, 1983, p. 22), and using characters speaking colloquial speech can be mentioned. Robins most prominent play, *Votes for Women*, is considered as an inaugurating suffrage drama (John, 1995, p. 2), pursuing another Ibsenite technique: silence to speech. In this play, Vida who is taken by other women as a silent mysterious woman in the first act, goes and speeches in front of a group of unsettled men in the second. This play also traces the development of women in general, from silence to protest.

Before Robins acting Hedda Gabler in 1891, women were mainly playing roles in melodramas. Robins notes in her paper on Ibsen that "creation of believable, modern, intelligent women on stage who were not simplified stereotypes was in itself a breakthrough to Ibsen that the world was effectually familiarized with the fact that woman's soul no less than her brother's is the battleground of good and evil" (Robins, 1908). Ibsen's concept of 'new woman' impacted both the actors who played in his shows and those who saw the shows. According to Katherine E. Kelly, "the women who performed, translated and attended Ibsen performances deliberately distinguished themselves from the majority of public opinion that viewed Ibsen as diseased, degenerate, and unseemly" (Kelly, 2008, p. 26). Along with socio-political activism, the suffrage drama helped women activists understand the concept of the 'New Woman'. The coinage of the word, 'New Woman' has its own history:

The term the "New Woman" was coined in England in March 1894 when Sarah Grand, whose well-known novel *The Heavenly Twins* appeared the previous year, published "The New Aspect of the Woman Question" in the *North American Review*. In the essay she uses the phrase "the new woman" to denote the woman who has finally "solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman's-Sphere, and prescribed the remedy." Within two months the phrase the "New Woman," now printed with capital letters, was ubiquitous. (Nelson, 2001, p. ix).

Ibsen's 'new women', in contrast with the conventions of patriarchal families, rebelled against the dominant misogynistic norms, and asked for independence. After Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw (1856-

1950) and Henry James (1843-1916) developed and popularized the concept of 'new woman' more than any other literary figures in the turn of the twentieth century. However, the one who paid the most influential tribute to this concept and materialized it was Elizabeth Robins. Robins impersonated the concept of 'New Women' primarily with the character of Hedda Gabler. Robins herself writes, "I came to think of my early life as divisible into two parts: before or after Hedda" (quoted in John 1995, p. 55).

An era in which Ibsen was a major influence, and having strong women like Elizabeth Robins on stage, definitely advertised and promoted the concept of 'New Woman'. Robins, as Brenda R. Weber points out, "stands as a testament to the trials and epistemological shifts that accompanied the transition from Victorian to modern, particularly in a context of transatlantic nationalisms" (Weber, 2011, p. 486). As an epitome of a New Woman, "Hedda Gabler signified an anger that the actresses' professional reliance on popularity with audiences prohibited them from expressing more directly and assertively" (Farfan, 1996, p. 59). Relevantly, Robins became a target for many verbal insults and critical attacks for foreshadowing independent women. And of course this anger from male institutions were the reverberations of the falling power seeking resurrection.

Through the impersonation of Hedda Gabler, Elizabeth Robins "made 'vice' attractive. She has almost ennobled crime. She has stopped the shudder that so repulsive a creature should have inspired. She has glorified an unwomanly woman. She has made a heroine out of a sublimated sinner. She has fascinated us with a savage." (Scott, 1977, p. 227). Robins was outspoken toward the male critics. In one of her lectures, "Ibsen and the Actress," she addresses her critique to the critic Clement Scott and stated, "Mr. Clement Scott understand Hedda?—any man except that wizard Ibsen really understand her? Of course not. That was the tremendous part of it. How should men understand Hedda on the stage when they didn't understand her in the persons of their wives, their daughters, their woman friends?" (Robins, Ibsen and the Actress, 1973, p. 18). One reviewer of *The Stage* described Robins: "not a woman but a thing; a beast degraded from womanhood; half an idiot and very much of a devil" (*The Stage*, 1891).

Hedda, and of course Ibsen's other new women, Nora and Hilda, tremendously helped changing the stage and audiences' views towards women. Robins, and her feminist contemporaries were inspired with these characters. Such inspirational characters inaugurated the birth of feminism in two major ways: First, by

their introduction of new women on stage, they have provided examples for people who have forgotten the very sense of womanhood. Second, they exercised their role as women practitioners in a male environment. In fact, playwrights like Robins, planted the seed and encouraged the later feminists to practice 'Herstory'. It was about 1970s that the term 'Herstory' got popular in feminist discourse. The term comes from an 1875 "childhood story" of Robin's entitled "The Herstory of a Button." By writing herstory, as Ellen Rooney asserts, "a meaning beyond the personal, the act of self-exposure takes on a political justification, and could be seen as deriving its necessity not from individual desire but from a painful quest for truths, hidden by society, which could be reclaimed and made available for others" (Rooney, 2006, p. 122).

## CONCLUSION

In contrast to pro-suffrage drama/theatre, there were many anti-suffrage plays and cartoons which labeled women as sentimental, irresponsible, and hysteric. Among them were *The Spirit of Seventy-Six; or, The Coming Woman, A Prophetic Drama* (1868) by Ariana Randolph Wormeley Curtis and Daniel Sargent Curtis, and a comedy *The New Woman* (1984) by Sydney Grundy. In these plays, men reacted passionately against women by ridiculing the concept of New Woman, prophesying that they would make themselves ill and destroy national life, insisting that they were rebelling against nature (Bederman, 1995).

Suffrage movement achieved its goals in 1928 with the right of votes for all women aged 21 and older. Many historians believe that modern liberal feminism has shaped through suffrage movement. However, the concept of feminism has changed. The definitions have changed. A 'New Woman', for Elizabeth Robins and many other Suffragists, was someone beyond a woman riding a bicycle, smoking a cigar, or wearing jeans. Robins and her contemporary female intellectuals had learned the meaning of individuality and self-construction from Ibsen and Hedda Gabler. Nevertheless, they did not confine themselves to isolate characters imprisoned at home, as did Ibsen's. They cultivated a strong inner self that would transcend the individual body and would construct a collective mass. As we see in Robins's *Votes for Women*, Vida, the protagonist of the play who had committed an infanticide, would forgive the Stoner in that he supports the suffrage movement. What counted most importantly in suffrage themes was crossing from darkness to light even by sacrificing the self.

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## The Encoding / Decoding Model on Keats's “Ode on a Grecian Urn” as a Thing

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### ABSTRACT

John Keats, a main figure in the second generation of Romantic poets, was not generally well received by his contemporary critics, though during the course of time, he has become one of the most beloved poets. Stuart Hall proposes an analytical model of communication, namely the encoding/decoding model, which assumes a complex structure of relations to be produced and sustained through linked but distinctive moments which are termed as production, circulation, distribution/consumption, and reproduction. This paper employs Hall's encoding/decoding communication model as a yardstick to move beyond his approach, which mainly addresses modern mass media and communication system, and relate the distinctive moments playing integrally in encoding and decoding to Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn* (1819). Furthermore, there is an attempt to turn the spotlight on the ode's durability after the French Revolution passions abate and the poem starts to gain its thingness.

Keywords: Stuart Hall; Keats; encoding; decoding; thingness; Grecian urn.

### INTRODUCTION

Stuart Hall (1932- 2014) the Jamaican-born cultural theorist and sociologist, along with Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, was one of the founding figures of the school of thought known as *British Cultural Studies*. Hall's propositions primarily address representation, identity, hegemony and cultural studies. A favorite social site to be profoundly analyzed was mass media communication taken into fuller account through his encoding/decoding model of communication which, like textual analysis, focuses on the scope of negotiation and opposition on the part of the audience. Critical of the long held traditional “mass-communication research” which “has conceptualized the process of communication in terms of a circulation circuit or loop”, Hall openly takes a semiotic approach developing his mindset on how media messages are produced, circulated, consumed, and finally reproduced (Hall et al. 2005, p. 117). A text- be it a movie, book, or even a poem- is not simply passively accepted by the audience but interpreted by them based on their individual experience and cultural background. A text may have no objective meaning, but it contains a variety of objectively describable features. The response of a

particular reader is the joint product of the reader's own horizon of expectations and the confirmations, disappointments, refutations, and reformulations of these expectations. There is a dialectic or dialogue between a text and the horizons of successive readers.

Stuart Hall takes into consideration “the way in which culture organizes everyday life” (Edgar & Sedgwick, 2002, p. 92). The concept and core of culture have constantly been of paramount notice, especially since mid-nineteenth century and Matthew Arnold's series of periodical essays collected as *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). In this work Arnold argues that culture is then “properly described not as having its origin in curiosity, but as having its origin in the love of perfection; it is a study of perfection” (pp. 44-5). Then if it is a study of harmonious perfection, culture holds a significant function to mankind as it “consists in becoming something rather than in having something, in an inward condition of the mind and spirit, not in an outward set of circumstances” (p. 48). Nonetheless the perfection ideal of culture is not so vigorously escalated by succeeding critics and some of them, namely Stuart Hall, tend to perceive culture as a semiotic phenomenon encompassing discourse and representation. This paper tends to address Hall's

encoding/decoding communication model as a yardstick to relate the distinctive moments playing integrally in encoding and decoding to Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn* (1819). It should be noted that Hall's communication model typically applies to mass media and the proposed moments, namely production, circulation, distribution/consumption, and reproduction, are basically expected in mass media analysis, nevertheless a broader application can make sense when addressing the reception of poems at a particular period of time. In other words, it could assist us to take a moderately novel look at a historical communication medium, being a poem, and look into its good or poor reception in the era wherein it was composed. With this task being accomplished, we will mark the poem's durability long after its first appearance, while taking note of the *Thing Theory* and *Thingness* proposed by modern thinkers, the key figures of which should include Bill Brown, Jane Bennett and Daniel Miller.

Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), a German philosopher, became a founding figure of German idealism in his own right and is nowadays appreciated for his original insights into the nature of self-consciousness and subjectivity. Fichte daringly invites us to look from the point of view of the object and collapses the distinction between subject and object by showing "how the very thought of an object is indistinguishable from the object's call or summons to the thinker" (Cole, 2013, p. 107). Here he refers to the call of things, the demands that objects make upon subjects: "The objects are not comprehended, and cannot be other than bare summons calling upon the subject to act" (Cole, 2013, pp. 107-8). Upon pursuing the call of things, a number of leading concepts comes in handy to carry out this comparatively analytical study integrating Stuart Hall's groundbreaking communication model with the propositions brought up in thing theory studies. These concepts should include "the thingness of objects" (Brown, 2001, p. 4), "the incalculability of the thing" (Bennett, 2012, p. 242) and pottery craft as "less verbose practice" (Bennett, 2012, p. 242). In regarding Hall's model, several exclusive terms come into view, including hegemonic viewpoint, discursive forms, arbitrary linguistic signs and dominant discourses. The interplay built among these culturally-pregnant concepts and terms, while keeping a glimpse at the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary compulsions born out of the French Revolution, would make way toward working out the reception of Keats's *Ode* during and after his life time. In simple terms, Keats' poems, particularly *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, hardly ever passed successfully through the last moments, distribution and reproduction, Hall pro-

poses, because ideas rich in revolutionary impetus were better consumed and reproduced than those poetic lines which appeared less prone to the current revolutionary thoughts.

## THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND LITERARY REVOLUTION

Many commentators such as William Hazlitt drew a direct correlation between socio-political revolution and literary revolution as a consequence in Britain. It may be claimed there was a fairly precocious precedent for such a correlation in the 1800 preface to *Lyrical Ballads* hinting at Wordsworth's idea of a necessary connection between 'society' and 'literature':

Several of my Friends are anxious for the success of these poems...on this account they have advised me to prefix a systematic defense of the theory, upon which the poems were written. But I was unwilling to undertake the task.... For to treat that subject with the clearness and coherence, of which I believe it susceptible, it would be necessary to give a full account of the present state of the public taste in this country, and to determine how far this taste is healthy or depraved; which again could not be, without pointing out, in what manner language and the human mind act and react on each other, and without retracing the revolutions not of literature alone but likewise of society itself' (Day, 1996, pp. 85-6).

Feverous compulsions, as consequences of the French revolution, never ceased in figures' minds and pens but were given fuller voice through the communication media- books and articles. In *The Prelude* William Wordsworth "evokes from the unbounded and hence impossible hopes in the French Revolution a central Romantic doctrine; one which reverses the cardinal neoclassic ideal of setting only accessible goals, by converting what had been man's tragic error- the inordinancy of his 'pride' that persists in setting infinite aims for finite man- into his specific glory and his triumph" (Day, 1996, p. 98). The revolution had already built revolutionary ideology- either physical or mental- in the society and its discourses were constructed and encoded by men of letters. Such a connection between the revolution and English literature is articulated by Edward Dowden in *The French Revolution and English Literature* (1897):

The closing years of the eighteenth century and the opening years of the nineteenth... are pre-eminent for the keenness and intensity of the lyrical cry in literature. A vast epic, however, of

historical struggle, of national aspiration and national effort [The French Revolution], was being unrolled before the eyes of men. It did not stifle the lyrical cry of the Romantic poets, but it added a breadth and volume to their passions. (p. 158)

By the same token, M. H. Abrams contends that Romantic poets were almost all centrally political and social (Day, 1996, p. 94). Yet despite the dominant revolutionary discourses underpinned during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, not all writers represented them in the communication media via which messages were encoded. In Hall's words, the hegemonic viewpoint "defines within its terms the mental horizon, the universe, of possible meanings, of a whole sector of relations in a society or culture" (Hall, 1980, p. 137). However, Keats's unwavering love of beauty and pleasure was accompanied by his detachment from the excitement and turmoil stirred by the French revolution which defined a large part of the mental horizon of possible meanings in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century English culture. Least concerned with the social issues of life, Keats is said to hold the distinction of being the most romantic of romantics, with his poems being composed for the sake of poetry and pleasure, being no palpable propaganda for the propagation of certain objectives. Contrary to many of his major English poets such as Wordsworth and Shelly, Keats kept his distance from revolutionary goings-on and led a life busy with the beauty of nature and proneness to it. His disengagement from the political issues obsessing many of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars can be implicitly traced in his suggestion of negative capability which invites thinkers to be capable of being in 'uncertainties, mysteries and doubts' and not to involve personal feelings in poetry. Yet 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are generally marked by revolutionary discourses suggestive of commitment to revolutionizing the world, either the outer or inner world. Whereas most of the Romantic poets came under the influence of French revolution, Keats remained the ardent lover of sensual imagery, as his "Endymion" suggests that "A thing of beauty is a joy forever" (1899, p. 49). Running along the same venues, Stopford Brook (2013) remarks that:

The ideas that awoke the youthful passion of Wordsworth, of Coleridge, that stirred the wrath of Scott, that worked like yeast in Byron and brought forth new matter, that Shelley re clothed and made into a prophecy of the future the excitement, the turmoil, the life and death struggle which gathered round the Revolution were ignored and unrepresented by Keats... in Keats the ideas of the Revolution have disappeared. He has, in spite of a few passages and till quite the end of his career, no vital

interest in the present, none in man as a whole, none in the political movement of human thought, none in the future of mankind, none in liberty, equality, or fraternity, no interest in anything but beauty. (pp. 197-8).

In his ode, Keats is amazed at the vain ecstasy and struggle pursued by people: "What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape? / What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?" (9-10). Although he plainly notes the despair over the goal of kissing her which may almost never be accomplished, he consoles the 'Fair youth' with her eternity being preserved as long as the artistic Grecian urn keeps back the scythe of time. Nearly winning the goal of kissing her, the fair youth should never grieve as she is always fair:

Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave  
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;  
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,  
Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;  
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,  
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! (15-20)

The robustness and productivity of the Romantic life is no surprise since the romanticists were encouraged, stimulated and justified by historical circumstances in the wake of the French Revolution, but mainly in a spiritual manner, though, the Romantic figures "did not all laud the notion of politically revolutionary tendencies in Romanticism" (Dowden, 1897, p. 90). Keats is better known as the poet of *Beauty* but it should not overshadow Keats's latent or even unconscious impression drawn from the current discourses which manifests itself in his idea of *Negative Capability*; it is akin to a spiritual revolution sprouting from inside, especially after the drastic despair and disillusionment following the outside revolution: "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Keats, 1970, p. 43). Man's capability of receptivity to the world and its natural marvel, while rejecting the predetermined formulated theories and categorical knowledge, releases him from the yoke of the predetermined, which is implicitly a manifestation of a kind of revolution, but it is a far cry from the hegemonic viewpoint of revolution propagated in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; his revolution lies in man's susceptibility to nature and beauty, not to the excitement and wrath stirred by the French revolution. The ode hails the reader to the immortal nature displaying ever-piping songs, which are 'unwearing' and always new, and boughs never bidding the spring adieu:

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed  
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;  
And, happy melodist, unwearied,

For ever piping songs for ever new;  
 More happy love! more happy, happy love!  
 For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,  
 For ever panting, and for ever young; (21-27)

Then no wonder his poems rarely got through the consumption moment and subsequently through the reproduction moment. In other terms detached from the dominant discourses awaking the passion and stirring the wrath and turmoil in many writers, his poems, being replete with sensual imagery and lacking in the vital interest of hegemonic literary viewpoint, could not easily draw attention to be consumed and reproduced by a wide audience. In fact, Keats encodes mainly the aesthetic aspects of Romanticism rather than revolutionary-pregnant ones, so his poems- in particular *Ode on a Grecian Urn*- were not comparatively welcomed by the wider audience. As mentioned earlier, the Revolution had largely affected Romantic generations- both the first- and second generations in different ways. Hancock (1899) clarifies on the impact of the French Revolution “bringing with it the promise of a brighter day, the promise of regenerated man and regenerated earth” (p. 47). He stresses the fact that it was received with joy and acclamation by “the oppressed, by the ardent lovers of humanity, by the poets whose task it is to voice the human spirit”, and among these poets were “two young Englishmen, Wordsworth and Coleridge, both at first full of faith in the great promise” (pp. 47-8). Although they initially sympathized with the philosophical and political principles of the Revolution, some writers, after the bloody turn of the Revolution and the emergence of the Reign of Terror, took on more conservative politics later in life. Hancock explains: “Then the Revolution failed; and with its failure came violence, bloodshed, and chaos”, however they did not necessarily refrain from any sort of revolution, but “these young men, once so ardent, now fearful, or, if you choose, now more wise, joined the ranks of the conservatives and the lost leaders” and it is obvious that “even in the face of failure and multitudinous horrors the spirits of Revolution still survived” (p. 48). The Revolution brought along a dramatic change in the constitution of the society “which should ameliorate the earthly condition of man and insure him against the oppression of despotic rulers” (p. 48). Hancock further argues that the revolutionary ideas “were the historic foundations of the golden promise of the Revolution” which swept away the past “to change the figure, like a flood” (p. 49). The flood in political life left its significant mark on the poetical life as well. However, despaired of the outer Revolution, some poets gravitated towards revolutionizing their inner world after witnessing fresh bloodshed and terror. Thanks to the newly

acquired freedom of the common people, the spirit of Revolution directed many writers, particularly Wordsworth and Shelley, to write for and about working men and the like.

Prior to the French Revolution, however, literary works emphasized restraint, self-control, and common sense and they mainly addressed aristocrats and clergy, and rarely the working men. Motivated by the revolutionary spirit, the writers brimmed over with new ideas and awaited a chance to unleash them. Many of them turned to ordinary lives to portray and pieces that the common man could relate to. Peter Kemp, in *Encyclopædia Britannica online*, argues that “fresh ideals came to the fore; in particular, the ideal of freedom, long cherished in England, was being extended to every range of human endeavor” (para 2). The most notable feature of literary pieces is the emergence of individualism and imagination while “the main trend of 18th-century poetics had been to praise the general, to see the poet as a spokesman of society addressing a cultivated and homogeneous audience and having as his end the conveyance of ‘truth’” (para 3). The poet became an individual strongly relying on his perceptions and the workings of his own mind. Feeling and imagination became the finest criteria to define the Romantic poetry as Wordsworth’s famous statement of spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings indicates the emphasis put on feelings, which implicitly bring forth sincerity and naturalness.

#### LINGUISTIC CODES IN *ODE ON A GRECIAN URN*

Keats employs the rhetorical device *ekphrasis*, which is “the intense pictorial description of an object...to evoke an image in the mind’s eye as intense as if the described object were actually before the reader” (Cuddon, 1998, p. 252). Keats intensely relates pottery as a medium of art to poetry as another medium of art by defining and describing its essence and form. His ode yields resemblance by imagery to the eye a visible representation of the painting on the urn. It goes without saying that the Greek urn transcends a merely silent sensual object via the linguistic codes giving voice to this otherwise mute art object. Basically the urn as an object turns into a thing since “less verbose practice [pottery in here] is probably better suited to the task of acknowledging the call of things” (Bennett, 2012, p. 242). The art of pottery and painting silently provoke the poet’s imagination as the urn is a “foster-child of silence and slow time” (2) which was created from stone by an artist encoding the message(s) through no words but “unheard” sweeter melodies. Contrary to Neo-

classical stress on man's finitude, reason, attempted objectivity, conformity and mechanical form, Keats underlies spontaneity, intuition and organic form: "I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of the Imagination-What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth-whether it existed before or not" (Keats, 1970, pp. 36-7). On the same mainstream, it is not "the sensual ear" to which the unheard melodies are played:

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter: therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;  
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,  
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone: Fair youth,  
beneath the trees, thou canst not leave. Thy song,  
nor ever can those trees be bare; (11-16)

In relation to Hall's communication model, before the production of meaning and message, there would precede frameworks of knowledge and relations of production which exist embedded in the dominant discourses. As mentioned earlier, revolutionary discourses of freedom and disposal of despotic rulers were rather pervasive during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in Britain and had been encoded and decoded by many thinkers and even common people to their own perception. By decoding, it is not meant simply basic recognition and comprehension of what a text says but the interpretation and evaluation of its meaning with respect to the relevant codes, though there is unlikely full consensus on the decoded meanings amongst the intended audience, since "decodings do not follow inevitably from encodings" and there exists "no necessary correspondence" (Hall et al. 2005, p. 125). Following up the argument further into social hypothetical positions of readers, Hall identifies three major positions for them, namely "dominant-hegemonic position" through which the audience (exclusively the reader concerned in this paper) takes the connoted meaning full and straight; "the negotiated code or position" containing a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements; and finally "the oppositional code" decoding the message in a contrary way (Hall et al. 2005, pp. 125, 127). Should the last hypothetical position be taken by the majority of audience towards a communication medium, being a poem in this study, they will definitely "detotalize" the message in the preferred code or find it incompatible with their decoded meanings, thus the message and subsequently the poem will not effectively pass through the consumption and reproduction moments, which often failed to meet some of Keats's poems. The revolution, as mentioned earlier in Hancock's words, was received with joy and acclamation by the poets whose task is to voice the human spirit; the spirit being mainly defined as a free and revolutionary one whose end is to rebel against the

despotic rulers. Keats, however, remained the ardent lover of sensual imagery and beauty by all means. In his 1817 letter to his brother, Keats (1899) expressly suggests that "with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration" (p. 277). Such a strong belief in pure beauty far exceeded the public taste, so after the production moment, it could not have been circulated and finally reproduced.

As discussed earlier, the response of a particular reader is the joint product of the reader's own horizon of expectations and the confirmations, disappointments, refutations, and reformulations of these expectations. There is a dialectic or dialogue between a text and the horizons of successive readers. Once this dialogue is not built up between a text and a reader, the reproduction moment is hardly met and the text, being an ode here, is not received appropriately. Based on Hall's model, one reason could be that ideas rich in revolutionary impetus were better consumed and reproduced than those poetic lines which appeared less prone to the current revolutionary thoughts and kept distance from the current goings on of his time. In other terms, Keats encodes mainly the aesthetic aspects of Romanticism rather than revolutionary-pregnant ones.

With the passage of time, despair and disillusion arose but transported the outside revolutionary despair into an inside revolutionary hope and elation which are encoded as "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard/Are sweeter" (Keats, 1899, p. 135) as if those melodies outside sound infertile but those unheard (inside) fertile. This message as a social production, which is produced by the medium of poetry, has to be circulated, distributed and reproduced in the discursive form by the reader to have the circulation of the product live on. If the message is not taken, there can be no 'consumption' and "if the meaning is not articulated in practice, it has no effect" (Hall et al. 2005, p. 117). Keats's statement "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" reveals his unwavering faith on beauty and the truth arising from it, but this claim could not have been decoded as an effective representation of the present political movement of human thought in a society most of whose major figures are practically oriented toward revolutionary discourses.

Keats, born and raised in a middle-class family, grieved over the cold shoulders given to him since his poems seemed not to have been distributed and hence consumed under the shadow of the dominant-hegemonic discourses of revolution which were never as pronounced in his poems as in his contemporaries. With *Ode on a Grecian Urn* set as an example, the

encoded messages do not perfectly satisfy "a need" and are not "put to a use" (Hall et al. 2005: 119), thus the reception is not built with the reader. Based on Hall's model, the audience are barely passive receivers and they actively participate in the production process in a larger sense along with the production itself, though the latter is predominant because it is "the point of departure for the realization of the message" (Hall et al. 2005, p. 119). Elasmar and Hunter (2012) similarly contend that "the individual audience members are not passive receivers of television messages; rather, audiences actively choose among the many available messages" (p. 50). In a comparable way, R. S. White (1987) contends that for Keats reading provides "a simultaneous continuum between passivity and active creation" and the words he is reading are supposed "to be activated by the reader's relationship with them, which may change from time to time even when the same reader reads the same text" (pp. 21-2). Given that, Keats was certainly not heedless of the co-operative relationship where "reader and text become indissolubly united in a moment of creativity" (22). Coping with the dramatic change caused by the revolution which struck English people like a flood, readers, assumed as active participants of a text could not be expected to gravitate to an ode which appears unaffected by the suffering and hardship inflicting upon them. The urn itself is "unravish'd," or pure: "Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness / Thou foster-child of silence and slow time" (1-2); the trees never have to deal with losing their leaves: "Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed/Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu" (21-22); and even the violent sacrifice of a cow hasn't been committed yet: "Who are these coming to the sacrifice? / To what green altar, O mysterious priest, / Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies, / And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?" (31-4).

Brought up in a middle-class community and often ill and in debt, Keats never appealed to a good number of attentive audiences, so the communication circuit can have been disrupted at distribution or consumption moment, so his *Ode on a Grecian Urn*- similar to his other poems- was not approached justly at his life time. As Hall suggests, a message would be received at a specific stage if it is recognizable or appropriate, but seemingly the ode's message was not well recognized in its immediate reception. The first response to the ode came in an anonymous review in the July 1820 *Monthly Review* claiming that "Mr Keats displays no great nicety in his selection of images. . . he thinks that anything or object in nature is a fit material on which the poet may work . . . Can there be a more pointed conceit than this address to

the Piping Shepherds on a Grecian Urn?" (Matthews, 1971, p. 162). Josiah Condor, the editor of the British literary magazine *The Eclectic Review*, argues that:

Mr. Keats, seemingly, can think or write of scarcely anything else than the 'happy pieties' of Paganism. A Grecian Urn throws him into an ecstasy: its 'silent form,' he says, 'doth tease us out of thought as doth Eternity,'- a very happy description of the bewildering effect which such subjects have at least had upon his own mind; and his fancy having thus got the better of his reason, we are the less surprised at the oracle which the Urn is made to utter. (Matthews, 1971, p. 237)

Matthews then goes on critiquing 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' in fairly harsh words which may have left their marks on Keats's sensitive spirit: "That is, all that Mr Keats knows or cares to know. But till he knows much more than this, he will never write verses fit to live" (p. 237).

With the dominant-hegemonic revolutionary discourses less pronounced, Keats does not utterly keep away from his current ideology as he subtly reverses neoclassic ideal of only accessible goals in his ode when emboldening the lover not to grieve though he can barely gratify his desire:

Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,  
Though winning near the goal - yet, do not grieve;  
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,  
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! (17-20)

### THE URN AS A *THING*

Poetry, as a communicative medium, embeds arbitrary linguistic signs that are more or less products of conventions. Subsequently the farther from the conventional discourses, the less reception from the audience; Hall argues that "the articulation of an arbitrary sign- whether visual or verbal- with the concept of a referent is the product not of nature but of convention, and the conventionalism of discourses requires the intervention, the support of codes" (Hall et al. 2005, p. 121). With that given, despite comparably little attention to Keats's ode during his life time, principally due to the asymmetry of its encoded messages with the dominant ideological discourses which basically favored revolutionary ideas and moves imbued with anarchism and liberalism, it started to receive more scholarly appreciation after the heat of revolution nearly diminished, concurrent with which Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, in Brown's terms, began to gain its thingness: "we begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us [. . .] when their

flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested” (Brown, 2001, p. 4). In simple terms, once an object breaks down or is used contrary to our expectations, it no longer serves its common function and it casts away its socially encoded value and appears to us in new ways by suspending our habits of seeing it. Hence, Brown continues, the story of objects “asserting themselves as things” is the story of “a changed relationship to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation” (p. 4). Comparatively speaking, the Grecian urn has already shed its socially recurring encoded value and been transformed from an object into a thing as it no longer serves the function of an urn but that of a raconteur of a flowery tale which narrates the story of deities and mortals, men and gods, bold lover and fair beloved. It far exceeds a common urn to preserve water or the like, but it becomes the preserver of sweet unheard melodies. The urn has gotten rid of the common circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, thus it has gained its thingness. Now it is a thing worth of being narrated.

Historically speaking, the ode’s asymmetry with the dominant ideological discourses began to disappear as time blurred them in the ensuing years and the ode raised from the ashes and drew increasingly close attention. To Matthew Arnold’s acclaim, the passage describing the little town “is Greek, as Greek as a thing from Homer or Theocritus; it is composed with the eye on the object, a radiancy and light clearness being added” (1971, p. 378). Sidney Colvin (1920) also lauds the ode as a masterpiece: “while imagery drawn from the sculptures on Greek vases was still floating through his mind, he was able to rouse himself to a stronger effort and produce a true masterpiece in his famous *Ode on a Grecian Urn*” (p. 415). Featuring the imagery drawn from the sculptures, the poem depicts the Grecian Urn as an eternal thing which should transcend any confinement of time and place since it is the child of ‘slow time’:

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
 Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,  
 Sylvan historian, who canst thus express  
 A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:  
 What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape  
 Of deities or mortals, or of both,  
 In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?  
 What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?  
 What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?  
 What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy? (1-10)

Evidently John Keats, either consciously or unconsciously, had fathomed the thingness of the urn and

the incalculability leading to its retreat from the ruthless time which has not ravished it yet. The urn can express the history in a flowery tale free of any verbal or written rhyme because it is no longer an object but a beautiful thing which sweetly tells the truth that “Beauty is truth, truth beauty” (49). Ironically the poet understates the written codes to elate the visual codes of the urn, thus “a flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme” (4), “those unheard / Are sweeter” (11-12), its happy boughs never shed leaves “nor ever bid the Spring adieu” (22), “For ever piping songs for ever new” (24) and the urn “shalt remain, in midst of other woe” (47). Such poetic remarks in one way or another lend relation to the ode itself as the poem is portraying an eternal thing being encoded via the linguistic codes of the poem.

On the other hand in 1819 there was no TV or internet to entertain Keats, therefore sitting around and staring at old pottery could have enthralled the poet and he would have engaged himself with the urn: “when we concentrate on a material object, whatever its situation, the very act of attention may lead to our involuntarily sinking into the history of that object” (Brown, 2001, p. 7). Hence, it is more than history lying within the urn and subsequently in the poem which transcends the worn, tough surface of the urn; it is the *void* constituted by the urn and poem; it is, as Brown explains, all those “spaces within [...] that enables us to image and imagine human interiority” (p. 7). Thus not a merely verbose object does portray human interiority more accurately than an object having retained its thingness. Keats represents his own interior through the urn’s depicted scenes and once the urn as an object gains its thingness, it encodes the message lying somehow within the human interiority:

When old age shall this generation waste,  
 Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
 Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,  
 "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," - that is all  
 Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know. (46-50)

## CONCLUSION

Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding communication model is best suited for the analysis and description of televisual images and mass media and how the dominant and hegemonic discourses are encoded within them under the influence of the frameworks of knowledge and relations of production. However, his model can comparatively address the historical reception of other sorts of communication media such as poetry and take into account how a poem is received at a particular era. Keats’s *Ode on a Grecian*

*Urn* was barely welcomed by his contemporaries. Many of whom were brimming over with the revolutionary impulse of the French Revolution. Yet with the decline of the revolutionary compulsion, the ode posthumously emerged and began to gain its thingness and durability. In the course of time, the eternity of the painted scenes entailing the ode's durability preserve it from, in Shakespeare's words, time's "scythe to mow". Taking recourse to the images drawn from pottery as 'less verbose practice', the ode receives wider audience, especially among the academia, by calling forth its thingness.

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## A Comparison of Obama's 2007 and Hillary Clinton's 2015 Bids for Presidency Speeches

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### ABSTRACT

The article sought to study Barack Obama's 2007 bid for the presidency in his Announcement Speech and Hillary Rodham Clinton's 2015 bid for the presidency in her Campaign Launch Speech. It focused on how both candidates used the central ideas and their development into the main ideas of the speeches to declare their bids for President of the U.S.A. The research raised some questions regarding whether the two speeches had similarities, as both politicians were running in the presidential race on the Democratic Party's path. The research method employed qualitative content analysis to study the core meaning of the speeches based on new analytical narratives viewed in terms of specific rhetorical strategies. Subsequently, the study interpreted the underlying thought behind the speeches by focusing on the central ideas and their elaboration into the main ideas. The article showed that Obama and Clinton shared some similarities as they attempted to earn the support of Americans of all backgrounds. They defended the cause of the middle-class economy. Obama focused more on a coalition of Americans of diverse background and change, whereas Clinton focused more on furthering the middle-class economy.

Keywords: Obama's and Clinton's bids for Presidency, Obama's and Clinton's presidential campaign speeches, Obama's and Clinton's presidential race, Democratic presidential candidates, Democratic platform, American presidential race.

### INTRODUCTION

It is very common for politicians who intend to run for presidential races to take their time in officially announcing their candidacies. In American politics, such candidates usually allow themselves sufficient time before they vigorously embark on the campaign trail throughout the country. Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton (henceforth referred to as Obama and Clinton, respectively) were rivals in their attempts to win the Democratic Party's official nomination for the 2008 U.S. presidential election. Finally Obama won the race and got the Democratic Party's nomination and ultimately won the race to the White House after defeating his Republican rival, John McCain. As Obama's second term of presidential office was drawing to a close, Clinton ran for the 2016 presidential election as would-be first female president of the U.S.A. Indeed, Hillary herself has been in public view on the national level for more than two consecutive decades: first as first lady when Bill Clinton was the U.S. president for two terms of office. Then, she served two terms in elected public office as a senator from New York. After she was defeated by Obama in the 2008 primary race, to her

party's and comrades' astonishment, she accepted Obama's offer to serve as Secretary of State in his administration. With a long record of experience, she stood unmatched within her own party.

### Scope of the Research

The scope of this research is a rhetoric and discourse study involving inquiry into both Obama's and Clinton's carefully scripted texts using rhetorical craft to communicate their persuasive political thoughts and goals in their bids for the U.S. presidency. The research is focused on the core meaning of both figures' invention of the central ideas and their further elaboration on some of the main ideas to communicate their arguments in their bids for the U.S. presidency. This research used the term "style of political communication" to refer to a distinct way of using language to create a certain effect to achieve political goals (cf. Verdonk, 2002, p. 5,6).

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This research identified the central ideas in accordance with the idea of "invention"—the first of five

canons of rhetoric (cf. Beebe & Beebe, 2009, p. 447; cf. Hesford & Brueggemann, 2007, pp. 36-40; cf. De Beaugrande & Dressler, 1990, p.14; cf. Leith & Myerson, 1989, p. 15)—and then developed it to become a complete text in terms of a set of main ideas. To identify the rhetorical canon of “invention”, this paper used the rhetorical construct of “the central idea of a speech”, which is the underlying thoughts of a speech expressed in “a one-sentence summary of the speech content” (cf. Beebe & Beebe, 2009, p. 31), to decipher the core meaning of both Obama's and Clinton's bids for the U.S. presidency. For that purpose, analytical narratives were used to deconstruct the scripts of the speeches to determine the thoughts underlying each speech. The same processes also helped identify the “main ideas” of the speeches as further development of the central ideas into key points of the speech in the text-making process (cf. Beebe & Beebe, 2009, pp. 30-32). This paper aims to examine how these constructs were used to organize meaning resources in order to communicate both political figures' lines of thought and political goals in their respective speech (cf. Verdonk, 2002; cf. Thornborrow, 2002; cf. Becker, 1977).

This work involved closely scrutinizing the organization of these meaning resources using certain rhetorical techniques (cf. Leanne, 2010). Such techniques include introducing an effective ice-breaker to an audience with the aim of establishing common ground for breaking down barriers (pp. 15, 16, 63), sending a message that could earn a wider audience for a speaker to achieve transcendence (pp. 42,43), conveying vision through personalization by means of down-to-earth everyday examples of ordinary life (p. 17), sending and personalizing messages that can be easily grasped by common people (pp. 74-76), sending a message related to the audience's shared experience and familiarity by evoking relations to events or iconic characters in history (pp. 48, 49, 82, 83), using resonating words or phrases from political lexicon by borrowing words from iconic figures in history (pp. 22, 56, 59), and ending a speech by signaling a strong sense of determination and involvement on the part of the audience by using a crescendo tone and leaving a strong impression (pp. 18-19).

#### **DATA AND SOURCES OF THE DATA**

The sources of the data for this article were Obama's 2007 bid for the U.S. presidency, known as his Announcement Speech (Obama, 2007a). The prepared text was delivered against the backdrop of the Old State Capitol Building in Springfield, Illinois (2007b). Meanwhile, for Clinton's 2015 bid for the

U.S. presidency, this research used her first campaign launch speech in running for the 2016 presidential race (Clinton, 2015b). The prepared text was delivered on June 13, 2015, in Roosevelt Island, New York, two months after her official announcement to run for the 2016 U.S. presidency (Clinton, 2015a; cf. Lisa, 2015). The data were Obama's and Clinton's central ideas and main ideas in their bids for the presidency.

#### **RESEARCH METHODS**

The research conducted a qualitative content analysis of Obama's and Clinton's speeches as mentioned above to uncover their respective central ideas constituting sets of their main ideas in communicating their respective political thoughts and goals (cf. Krippendorff, 2004, pp. 16-30; cf. Schreier, 2013, pp. 1-8, 30). Krippendorff (2004, pp. 16,17) labels such an approach as interpretive because it requires a close reading of both speeches and rearticulating them into new analytical narratives. The method consists of the following steps: performing a close reading and rearticulating the content of both speeches, determining the research questions to focus on the inquiry related to the rhetorical craft to communicate the texts' persuasive political thoughts and goals in terms of how each expressed their bids for the U.S. presidency, attempting to interpret both texts, answering the research questions, and drawing conclusions and verifying the findings (cf. Krippendorff, 2004, pp. 29, 30).

In the data analysis, data reduction techniques were used, as the research goal was to focus on both Obama's and Clinton's rhetorical craft in communicating their political thought and goals in terms of the central ideas and key ideas in their bids for the U.S. presidency. The central idea of the respective speech was derived by deconstructing the organization of the meaning resources of the related speech scripts in terms of rhetorical techniques (cf. Leanne, 2010), rearticulated it into a new analytical narrative. Then, a one-sentence summary of the speech content was drawn (cf. Beebe & Beebe, 2009, p. 31) from the new analytical narrative (cf. Krippendorff, 2004, pp. 16, 17). Furthermore, the main ideas of the speech were derived by identifying the key points of the successive paragraphs of each speech script (cf. Beebe & Beebe, 2009, pp. 30-32) with the help of the new analytical narratives. In the research processes, the researcher used interpretation to arrive at the core meaning of the styles of the political communication as expressed in the central and main ideas of both speeches (cf. Schreier, 2013, pp. 4, 30). To explore the range of opinions or views on the topic of this paper, clarify

perspectives, and verify the depth of meanings of the speeches, the researcher had a natural discussion with some people having expertise on American politics and rhetoric (cf. “Research”, n.d.; cf also Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990, pp. 12-15, 141).

## ANALYSIS RESULTS

### Central Idea: Obama’s Announcement Speech

Obama announced that he was running for the presidential race on February 10, 2007, in Springfield, Illinois. His Announcement Speech was delivered against the backdrop of the Old State Capitol Building, which symbolically linked him to the historically iconic figure related to the site—Abraham Lincoln—the father of American unity who rose to national leadership as president. To establish common ground and linkages with his audience, Obama encouraged his audience’s participation in his “journey for a reason”, communicating the message of power and unity as one people to build a more perfect union. Thus, against this backdrop, Obama’s Announcement Speech sent the message to the American audience that his “improbable quest” for the presidency was part of the long journey for a more unified America begun by his predecessor.

As part of that journey of how he came to join the presidential race, Obama spoke about the American values of hard work for a better and greater cause shared by most Americans. He personalized the values by using a grass-root narrative of his initial career as a community organizer to play “a small part in building a better America” in Chicago’s poorest neighborhoods. He mentioned that Springfield had given him the best education. He went to law school, worked as a civil right lawyer, lectured on constitutional law, and then became a senator from the region. Subsequently, he was motivated to enter into politics because he had learned that some things could not be solved on the local level but could only be addressed on a higher political level. Springfield had taught him more about the decency of the American people, through which they could build a more hopeful America. Against the backdrop of the Old State Capital Building associated with the iconic figure of Abraham Lincoln, Obama announced that he was running for president. He was determined to deliver on his goal of changing the ways of Washington.

Obama reminded his audience that the American government was apt to change to be more responsive

to the needs of the people. People who loved their country could change it. Each generation had their own calls. He reminded his audience that they were called to change the ways of Washington—including the failed policies and broken politics of the ruling party. Through the American legacy, they, together as one people, were capable of meeting any challenges that would arise.

Obama’s message was soaring high as he referenced history and took advantage of his familiarity with his audience. No less important was how Obama also strongly emphasized the strength of America using intertextuality between the white tradition by citing Abraham Lincoln—“a tall, gangly, self-made Springfield lawyer”—and the black tradition by citing Martin King Luther Jr. as he powerfully insisted on “a King’s call to let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream”.

Obama’s message became transcendent as he emphasized the people’s commonalities—facing and solving their common challenges and problems—the failed policies and broken politics—together as one people. The message of a coalition of people of diverse backgrounds to meet their common problems and challenges was foregrounded in his audience’s awareness. He underscored that the campaign was not only his but also about things that they—he and the people—could do together to bring about change.

Using the historically iconic figure Abraham Lincoln and borrowing his resonating words, Obama underscored his plea for American unity and their mission together to transform the nation. Obama ended his speech by using the crescendo rhetorical technique and leaving a strong impression on the part of his audience to take action in joining his “improbable cause” to continue the unfinished job of perfecting the union in pursuit of a better America.

Based on the core content of the analytical narrative above, the central idea of Obama’s Announcement Speech can therefore be summarized as follows: “Only a broader coalition of Americans of the most diverse backgrounds can work to bring about change and unified force to overcome widespread problems in America”.

### Main Ideas: Obama’s Announcement Speech

The following is a table of the speech organization containing the main ideas of Obama’s Announcement Speech:

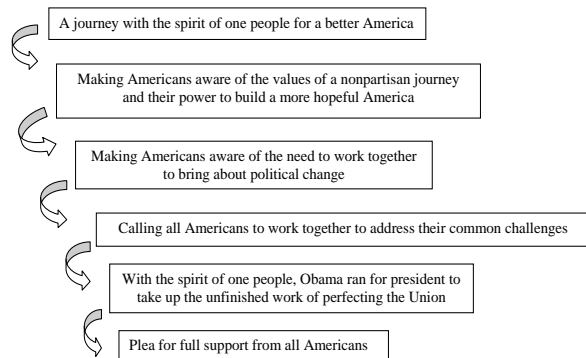
**Table 1.** Organization of the Main Ideas in Obama's Presidential Announcement Speech

Organization of the Main Ideas in the Speech	
1	<p><b>OPENING</b></p> <p>Appreciation for the audience joining him on a journey with the spirit of one people for a better America</p>
2	<p><b>BODY</b></p> <p>Nonpartisan journey and the decency of the American people to build a more hopeful America</p> <p>Reminding Americans of the need to work together to bring about political change</p> <p>Calling all Americans to work together to address their common challenges</p> <p>With the spirit of one people, Obama ran for president to take up the unfinished work of perfecting the Union.</p>
3	<p><b>CLOSING</b></p> <p>Plea for full support from all Americans</p>

**Foregrounded Message of Obama's Style of Political Communication**

Through careful and critical reading and comparison of the main ideas of the speech, the foregrounded message of Obama's political communication in the speech can be inferred as follows:

**Table 2.** Foregrounded Message of Obama's Style of Political Communication in the Announcement Speech



**Central Idea: Clinton's First Campaign Launch Speech**

Clinton's first campaign launch speech was delivered on June 13, 2015, in a political rally two months after the official announcement of her bid for the presidency by means of social media (Clinton, 2015a). The choice of the site on the park in Roosevelt Island, New York, could have been intended to evoke the spirit of Franklin D. Roosevelt, of whose legacy Clinton aimed to follow. She took a position of standing tall as she mentioned the headquarters of the United Nations, a place visible from the site where she had represented the U.S.A., evoking her prior role and experience on the international forum that could be of advantage to her

later as future commander in chief. Meanwhile, her use of the phrase "no ceiling" to refer to the open air park aimed to evoke the image of the "glass ceiling" metaphor, referring to the highest position that women can see but not attain. This reference reminded her audience that she could be the next—but first—female president of the U.S.A.

Clinton mentioned Roosevelt's enduring vision of America in which prosperity had to be built and shared by all. Later in the speech, she listed the four fights to follow in Roosevelt's steps that had become the focus of her campaign: strengthening the economy, strengthening families, increasing opportunities, and renewing the promise of the American democracy. She honored Roosevelt's legacy that was continued by two Democratic presidents, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, clearly indicating that she was also determined to keep this legacy alive. Her reference to those iconic figures showed her firm foundation to step into this role. Rhetorically, she was speaking with the goal of establishing common ground with her audience when referencing history and familiarity. This effort aimed to link her bid to her predecessors' legacies in emphasizing the middle-class economy. She also showed that she appeared to be a strong politician coming from a deep-rooted tradition as she borrowed resonating words from Roosevelt's political lexicon, such as equal opportunity, job security, no special privilege for the few, civil liberties, and standard of living. She reminded the audience of America's basic bargain with her Democratic predecessors. Clinton personalized the values of hard work and dreams of a better future in America's basic bargain by using tricolons and telling about her hard-working grandfather in the small business of printing drapery fabric that could finally reward him with middle-class life. The same success was true on the national level as Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama reached success in their respective administration, as both held tightly to the enduring basic bargain of America.

She talked about how to meet new challenges and keep moving forward with the economy and the democracy. She reminded her audience that the challenges they were facing originated from the false belief in another fundamental vision of the economy from the other party. She promised that it was time to realize that everyone's hard work would pay off. She promised to create prosperity for every American. It was for these reasons that she was declaring her run for the U.S. presidency, not just for a few but for all Americans. She was running for president and showed she was at odds with Republican top-down economic policies. She underscored the so-called inclusive economy, referring to the vision of America that her values and lifetime had taught her. Clinton

personalized the type of hope, perseverance and endurance shared by every American to meet everyday challenges. She mentioned that everyday Americans needed a chance and a champion, and she wanted to be that champion. She personalized her determination using a narrative of her own years of experience and work to show that she was more than ready to be a champion for all Americans. She pleaded for the support of all Americans to fight for the legacy of the four freedoms. She sought to build the American middle-class economy for everyday Americans. She wanted to strengthen American families to strengthen the nation. She aimed to harness American ingenuities to help America stay ahead in terms of peace, security, and prosperity. She wanted to reform the American government and revitalize the American democracy to better serve everyday Americans.

Clinton pleaded for the spirit of togetherness to work as one people to build the nation and to win the four fights: building an economy where hard work would pay off, strengthening families, defending the country and increasing opportunities, and renewing the promise of democracy.

She reminded her audience that the fight would not be easy. They would face challenges as the other side would still be promoting another fundamentally different vision of America. The job would be difficult, but she was quite determined to persevere. She personalized the importance of the value of perseverance in a narrative of her mother, who had taught and reminded her to keep fighting amidst various difficulties.

Clinton ended her first campaign launch speech on a crescendo, reminding the audience that the story of American progress could have been made only by hard struggles. She left a strong impression on the part of her audience to join her in the job of building the nation for their common good—a nation where nobody would be left out or left behind.

Based on the core content of the analytical narrative of Clinton’s speech above, the central idea of her first campaign launch speech can therefore be stated as follows: “America had to meet every challenge together as one people to strengthen the rewarding American middle-class economy, strengthen families, defend the country and increase opportunities, and renew the promise of democracy”.

**Main Ideas: Clinton’s First Campaign Launch Speech**

The following is a table of the speech organization containing the main ideas of Clinton’s First Campaign Launch Speech:

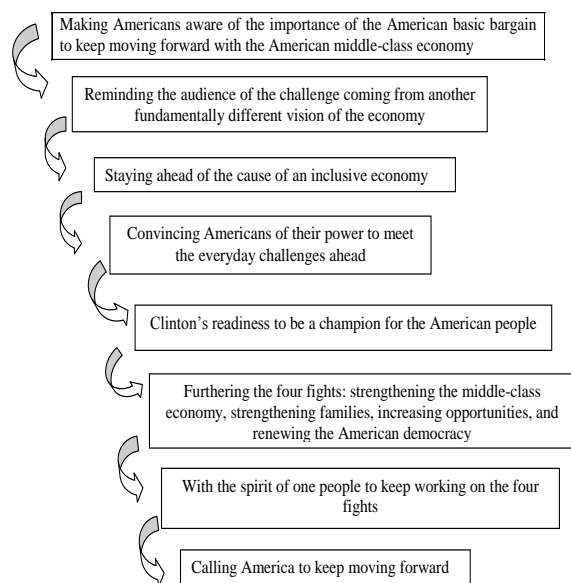
**Table 3.** The Main Ideas of Clinton’s First Campaign Launch Speech

<b>OPENING</b>	
1	Salutation and standing tall with the enduring vision of America
<b>BODY</b>	
2	The enduring values of the American bargain
3	Keeping ahead in the economy and the democracy
4	Creating prosperity for every American
5	Fighting against unemployment and economic inequality
6	At odds with Republican top-down economic policies
7	Promoting an inclusive economy
8	The potential of every American to face every challenge
9	Clinton’s readiness to be a champion for the American people
10	Strengthening the American middle-class economy
11	Strengthening American families
12	Maintaining America’s forward pace in leadership and increasing opportunities
13	Renewing the American democracy
14	With the spirit of one people to keep working on the four fights
15	Fighting against another fundamentally different vision of America
<b>CLOSING</b>	
16	Calling America to keep moving forward

**Foregrounded Message of Clinton’s Style of Political Communication**

Through careful and critical reading and comparison of the existing main ideas of the speech, the foregrounded message of Clinton’s style of political communication in the speech can be inferred as follows:

**Table 4.** Foregrounded Message of Clinton’s Style of Political Communication in Her First Campaign Launch Speech



### **A Comparison of Obama's and Clinton's Central Ideas**

Obama's central idea focused more on the theme of raising a coalition of Americans of diverse backgrounds to work together to bring about political change to counter the failed national leadership of the preceding Republican president and solve America's common problems as part of the job of perfecting the Union.

Clinton's central idea focused more on strengthening the American middle-class economy of the preceding administration, motivated by the awareness to keep America's basic bargain and the readiness with support of all Americans as one people to meet new challenges to keep working on the four fights: strengthening the economy, strengthening families, increasing opportunities, and advancing the American democracy.

### **A Comparison of Obama's and Clinton's Main Ideas**

Both Obama and Clinton shared the same ideology of the Democratic Party. For this reason, both continually reminded their prospective voters of the challenges coming from another fundamentally different vision of America. They both fought for the cause of the American middle-class economy. However, their political situations were very different. When Obama launched his bid for the presidency, his predecessor was a Republican president, George Bush. Obama aimed to demand change from his predecessor's failed leadership. It stood to reason that he would heavily criticize Bush's failed policies. By contrast, when Clinton was launching her bid for the 2016 presidency, her predecessor was Obama—from the same party—under whose first administration she had served as Secretary of State. Instead of criticizing him, she praised him along with another Democratic president, Bill Clinton, her husband, for honoring America's basic bargain in making them both successful. She sought to continue Obama's success. Therefore, for Obama, his bid meant to bring about fundamental change from Republican to Democratic politics. For Clinton, her bid meant to preserve and continue the implementation of the Democratic vision of economy and politics\*. The focus of her campaign

underscored the goal of advancing in the four fights: strengthening the economy, strengthening families, defending the country and increasing opportunities, and advancing the American democracy. Clinton would be in a worse position—to be labeled as a status quo presidential candidate—if she were not able to add more to Obama's accomplishments.

Obama linked himself as part of the procession in history to bring together Americans of diverse backgrounds to accept the unfinished job of perfecting the Union. By personalizing a romantic narrative of himself from very humble beginnings, he wanted to earn the support of all Americans to play a small role in contributing to a better America—a nonpartisan narrative shared by the majority of Americans. Undoubtedly, he was able to earn the support of a coalition of Americans of all backgrounds. Meanwhile, Clinton appeared to be standing tall as a politician with a long record of international experience and reputation. Like Obama, who used an iconic figure (Abraham Lincoln) and cited his words/phrases from his resonating political lexicon, Clinton also used an iconic figure (former President Franklin Delano Roosevelt) and borrowed his resonating words/phrases to keep her political goal alive. Obama used Lincoln to evoke and underscore the spirit of unity of all Americans to work together for their common good, whereas Clinton used Roosevelt to carry on the four freedoms. Clinton seemed to follow her Democratic predecessor as she enlisted the support of minorities such as LGBT voters, immigrants, and the majority of middle-class voters of various backgrounds. She sounded a more populous message as she promised to be a champion for all Americans and stated that she was running to make the so-called "inclusive economy" work for everyday Americans in which no one would be excluded. Prosperity was meant for all Americans. Obama's bid was also concerned with foreign policy, such as putting an end to the unending wars outside the country, whereas Clinton's bid was focused more on the strengthening of America's domestic middle-class economy that had been reclaimed by her Democratic predecessor. America's role in international affairs was sufficiently left to her track record on the international front, which she mentioned in citing her role in representing America on the international forum from the start and, of course, implicitly referring to the common knowledge of her track record as a former Secretary of State. Foreign policy was only slightly mentioned but not further elaborated, as she also sought to further the cause of defending the country to meet new global challenges requiring all elements of America's power.

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\* The argument is more convincing if Clinton's 2015 bid for the U.S. president is analyzed against the backdrop of Obama's bid for a second presidential term in his three speeches: the Osawatimie Economic Speech (2011), the State of the Union Address (2012a), and the Virginia Beach Campaign Speech (2012b). In these speeches, Obama underscored his goal of reclaiming the American middle-class economy

## CONCLUSION

Following the analysis and discussion of Obama's and Clinton's bids for the presidency, several conclusions can be drawn:

- a) Both Obama and Clinton sought to maintain America's middle-class economy motivated by the desire to honor America's basic bargain.
- b) Obama criticized the failed politics and policies of the preceding Republican president and sought to change them with the support of a coalition of Americans of diverse backgrounds.
- c) Clinton sought to continue the vision of creating a prosperous middle-class economy by emphasizing what she called an inclusive economy in which no one would be excluded and in which hard work would pay off for every American.

Finally, to better explore the whole context of Clinton's 2015 bid for the U.S. presidency, it would be worth studying her bid in light of Obama's bid for his second term as president, in which he underscored his goal to reclaim the American middle-class economy, particular in the following speeches: the Osawatomie Economic Speech (Obama, 2011), the State of the Union Address (Obama, 2012a), and the Virginia Beach Campaign Speech (Obama, 2012b).

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## Oral Corrective Feedback in an Intermediate EFL Conversation Class

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### ABSTRACT

This study was done to find out: (1) the types of oral corrective feedback (CF) strategies used by the teacher of an intermediate EFL conversation class and (2) the pedagogical focus of the oral CF in the intermediate EFL conversation class. This study was limited to oral CF given for grammatical and lexical errors found in the conversation class. The theory used as a guideline in this study was the eight major types of oral CF strategies by Sheen and Ellis (2011), supported by Sheen (2011). This study used descriptive qualitative approach. Video recording and semi-structured interview were used in this study. The writer found seven out of eight major types of oral CF strategies in the conversation class in which Didactic Recast was the strategy used the most. The teacher used the oral CF to correct both grammatical and lexical errors in the class; the emphasis, however, was on grammar. Thus, the pedagogical focus of the lesson is grammatical accuracy despite the fact that it is a conversation class because the teacher provided more oral CF strategies aiming at the learners' grammatical accuracy compared to lexical errors.

Keywords: error, oral corrective feedback, pedagogical focus.

### INTRODUCTION

English as an international language has been taught to most learners across the world. In both English as Second Language (ESL) and English as Foreign Language (EFL) countries, English can be found as one of the lessons at schools. In learning a new language, for instance English, learners would need to use and practice the target language. During the learning process, nevertheless, learners would experience making errors. Littlewood (1984) states: "Errors play an important role in learning process. Errors show that the language learners are still building the new knowledge in order to be able to use the language" (p. 17). Therefore, as a response to the learners' errors, teachers provide corrective feedback (CF).

According to Sheen and Ellis (2011), "corrective feedback (CF) refers to the feedback that learners receive on the linguistic errors they make in their oral or written production in a second language (L2)" (p. 593). Lyster et al. (2013) suggest "CF plays a pivotal role in the kind of scaffolding that teachers need to provide to individual learners to promote continuing L2 growth" (p. 1). CF has been a topic that is widely discussed by the researchers of Second Language

Acquisition (SLA); however, it is less discussed in EFL context (Méndez and Cruz, 2012). Thus, this has inspired the writer to do a study of CF, especially oral CF in EFL context.

The term oral CF itself is further defined by Sheen and Ellis (2011) in a more detail way by explaining that oral CF can be given at the time when a learner produces an oral error in his or her utterance (i.e. on-line) or after the communication or interaction in which a learner participates is over (i.e. off-line). Therefore, the word 'oral' is defined as learners' oral production. Thus, the term oral CF in this study is defined as the feedback given for errors found in learners' oral production (Sheen and Ellis, 2011).

The role of CF, including oral CF, has been a discussion among researchers. Researchers have argued that sufficient CF will likely support L2 development (Mackey et al., 2016). The use of CF provides chances for learners to notice the gap between their errors and the correct form (2016). By noticing the gap, learners can integrate the correction into their L2 knowledge (2016). In addition, oral CF can also assist L2 development when learners are given chances to produce outputs or to do self-correction (2016). Mackey et al. (2016) explain

further by stating “self-correction in response to feedback can trigger deeper and more elaborate processing of L2 forms, helping learners establish memory traces that last longer” (p. 502). Thus, the role of oral CF in SLA is seen to be important as it promotes acquisition (Sheen and Ellis, 2011).

In relation to teachers’ oral CF provision, Chaudron (1988) mentions: “classroom teachers will likely correct learners’ errors either when they pertain to the pedagogical focus of the lesson or when they significantly inhibit communication” (p. 136). One teacher’s oral CF might differ from others, and one of the reasons is because different classes would have different pedagogical focus. This means that a teacher might provide oral CF strategies differently when he or she teaches classes with different pedagogical focus. Chaudron (1988) claims that in terms of when to correct learners’ errors, pedagogical focus is a “major determinant” (p. 137).

This sparks the writer’s interest to look more deeply into oral CF in an EFL conversation class. The writer would focus on finding (1) the types of oral CF strategies used and (2) the pedagogical focus in relation to the teacher’s oral CF in the conversation class. The writer would look further into the classroom activities, including in what kind of activity and to what kind of error (grammatical or lexical) the oral CF is given to see the link between the oral CF provision and the pedagogical focus of the lesson.

## TYPES OF ORAL CF STRATEGIES

There are eight major types of oral CF strategies by Sheen and Ellis (2011), namely recasts (didactic or conversational), explicit correction, explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation, clarification requests, repetition, elicitation, metalinguistic clue, and paralinguistic signal. Sheen and Ellis (2011) classify all major types into two categories: input-providing and output-prompting. These categories are made based on the oral CF strategies, whether they are provided along with the correction (i.e. input-providing) or they act as feedbacks to prompt correction from the learners (i.e. output-prompting). The explanation for each type and examples supported by Sheen (2011) are provided below:

### Input-providing CF

1. **Recasts:** a type of oral CF which is defined as “a reformulation of the learner’s erroneous utterance that corrects all or part of the learner’s utterance and is embedded in the continuing discourse” (Sheen, 2011 p. 2). Recasts might be given only to

a part of speech of the learner’s error (partial) or to the whole speech of the learner (full) (Sheen, 2011). Recasts can also be ‘didactic’ or ‘conversational’ (as mentioned in Sheen, 2011, p. 2; Sheen and Ellis, 2011, p. 593). The explanation for didactic and conversational recasts are provided below:

- a) **Didactic recast:** a type of recast in which “the correction takes the form of a reformulation of a student utterance even though no communication problem has arisen” (Sheen and Ellis, 2011, p. 594). Full or partial didactic recast aims at directing the learner to notice the position of the error (Sheen, 2011).
  - b) **Conversational recast:** a type of recast where a teacher tries to restate the utterance according to what the teacher thinks is intended by the learner (Sheen, 2011). It occurs due to the failure in understanding the speaker’s utterance (Sheen and Ellis, 2011). It is also common to find this type of recast ends with a question tag, which makes it seem like a teacher is checking on the learner’s intended utterance (Sheen and Ellis, 2011).
2. **Explicit correction:** a type of oral CF in which a learner is given clear signs that he or she has made an error, and the teacher provides the correction directly to the learner (Sheen and Ellis, 2011; Sheen, 2011). This type of oral CF strategy is usually given by a teacher by saying “No”, “It’s not X but Y”, “You should say X”, “We say X not Y” (Sheen, 2011, p. 3).
  3. **Explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation:** the CF given with not only direct signals and the correction of the error as in explicit correction, but also metalinguistic explanation from the teacher about the error (Sheen and Ellis, 2011; Sheen, 2011). The example of this type of CF can be seen below:  
S: Fox was clever.  
T: The fox was clever. You should use the definite article ‘the’ because fox has been mentioned.  
(Sheen, 2011, p. 3)

### Output-prompting CF

1. **Clarification request:** the type of oral CF in which “attention is drawn to a problem utterance by the speaker indicating he/she (the teacher) has not understood it (the learner’s utterance)” (Sheen and Ellis, 2011, p. 594). Teachers usually say “Sorry?”, “Pardon me?”, or “I don’t understand what you just said” as clarification requests to learners (Sheen, 2011, p. 3).

2. **Repetition:** the type of oral CF in which a teacher repeats the learner's speech without giving any clue or sign, such as a high intonation to the error (Sheen and Ellis, 2011). A stress on the repetition is often used to attract the learner's attention as repetition is meant to elicit the correct form from the learner (Sheen, 2011). The example of repetition is provided below:

S: Mrs. Jones travel a lot last year.

T: Mrs. Jones travel a lot last year?

(Sheen, 2011, p. 4)

3. **Elicitation:** the type of oral CF where "an attempt is made to verbally elicit the correct form from the learner by, for example, a prompting question" (Sheen and Ellis, 2011, p. 594). Elicitation also comes in the form of a teacher's partial repetition of a learner's utterance to encourage self-correction (Sheen, 2011). An example of elicitation is provided as follows:

S: Once upon a time, there lives a poor girl named Cinderella.

T: Once upon a time, there.....

(Sheen, 2011, p. 4)

4. **Metalinguistic clue:** the oral CF that contains a metalinguistic explanation for the learner's error with no correction to the error as an attempt to prompt the correction from the learner (Sheen and Ellis, 2011; Sheen 2011). The example of metalinguistic clue can be seen below:

S: He kiss her.

T: You need past tense.

(Sheen, 2011, p. 4)

5. **Paralinguistic signal:** an oral CF strategy where the teacher does not use verbal signs to show that the learner has made an error and tries to elicit the correction from the learner (Sheen and Ellis, 2011). A teacher gives signals through "gesture or facial expression" (Ellis, 2009, p. 9).

The types of oral CF strategies mentioned above would be used as a guideline in relation to oral CF in this study.

## METHODS

This study used descriptive qualitative approach. The source of the data was the classroom activities and the semi-structured interview with the teacher. The data of the study were derived from the teacher's oral CF, which included the teacher's utterances and gestures, and the result of the semi-structured interview with the teacher.

For this study, the writer chose an intermediate conversation class from an English course in Surabaya. This course was chosen because it has been

running for a long time, and it also focuses particularly on learners' grammar and conversation. An observation was done previously in every conversation class in the English course, and there were three teachers of conversation class that the writer observed. The teacher who taught the intermediate level conversation class was finally chosen because the teacher was the only one who made use of CF in the conversation class. Based on the writer's observation, the teacher also seemed to know better about the learners in the conversation class and tended to be supportive in teaching and providing corrections to the learners in the conversation class. It is also further supported by the teacher's experience in teaching English. The teacher has been teaching English for 15 years, while the others were said to be new English teachers. Hence, the teacher was chosen for this study. After getting the permission from the English course, the writer started to collect the data.

The writer collected the data by recording the classroom activities and having a semi-structured interview with the teacher. In total, the writer collected four hours of classroom. Each meeting lasted for 60 minutes. The first classroom recording was recorded using an audio recorder. It was taken during the writer's observation of the conversation class. However, the writer made a change in collecting the classroom activities by doing video recording. The writer thought it would be better to analyze the classroom through a video to make it easier for the writer to see the teacher's oral CF provision, including the teacher's facial expression and gestures. The writer video recorded the classroom activities for three meetings. Other than recording the classroom activities, the writer also did a semi-structured interview with the teacher for further clarification of the findings. This interview was carried out to ask the teacher about her oral CF provision. At the end, the writer collected a total of four-hour classroom recording and a fifteen-minute interview.

In order to transcribe the data, the writer used detailed transcription for the classroom recordings, which included the details of the data, such as pauses, intonation, overlapping utterances, facial expressions and others (Elliott, 2005). For the teacher's interview, the writer used clear transcription where it focused only on the content of the data and would not include details of the data (e.g. pauses, non-lexical items) (2005).

After transcribing the classroom recordings, the writer analyzed the types of oral CF strategies that occurred

in the class. First, the writer took extracts of the teacher's and the learners' interaction that contained the teacher's oral CF from the transcription. Then, the writer wrote down the type of oral CF that the teacher used and gave further explanation on the teacher's oral CF along with the classroom activities where the oral CF strategy was given for the learners' errors (grammatical or lexical errors). By doing so, the writer could see how the teacher facilitated oral CF to the learners and see the relation of the oral CF with the pedagogical focus. The next step was to analyze the result of the interview with the teacher that had been transcribed. The interview was analyzed to see the relationship between the use of oral CF and the intention and purpose of the teacher in using the oral CF strategies. Thus, the writer was the one who interpreted the contents of the data and drew conclusions from it (Dömyei, 2007).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data of the classroom recordings, the writer found the use of recasts (didactic and conversational), explicit correction, explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation, clarification requests, repetition, elicitation, and metalinguistic clue in the conversation class. Paralinguistic signal was the only strategy that was not found in the classroom. This might be because the teacher had a preference in using verbal CF that would be clearer for the learners. Another thing is that this study found recasts, especially didactic recasts as the most often used type of oral CF strategies. Further explanation for each type of oral CF strategies is shown below:

### Input-providing CF

#### 1. Recasts

A recast is commonly known as "a reformulation of the learner's erroneous utterance that corrects all or part of the learner's utterance and is embedded in the continuing discourse" (Sheen, 2011, p. 2). This type of oral CF strategy is found to be the dominant correction strategy in the conversation class. The result of the teacher's interview also clarifies the teacher's use of recasts. According to the teacher, by directly reformulating the learners' errors, particularly grammatical errors, along with the corrections in a conversation class, she could save more time, and the learners could understand the correction immediately as well. Moreover, the teacher did not need to directly point out the errors that the learners made, which was a safer way to correct the learners without discouraging them. The writer found that the teacher also made use of both didactic and

conversational recasts in the classroom. Further details and examples of both recasts are provided below:

#### a) Didactic Recasts

A didactic recast is explained as the recast that is given to a learner's error, even if there is no difficulty in understanding the learner's utterance (Sheen and Ellis, 2011). Didactic recast is believed to be more explicit because the teacher's main aim is to correct learners' errors even when there is no communication problem arises (2011). The writer found that didactic recast was the strategy used the most in the class, particularly for treating the learners' grammatical errors. Based on the result of the interview, the teacher showed her desire where she wanted the learners to be proficient English speakers with good grammatical accuracy. She also showed her belief that most of the time when the learners made grammatical errors, it was because the learners forgot about the grammar. As a result, didactic recast was given to remind the learners about the correct grammar although the teacher had actually understood what the learners were saying. Didactic recast was given mostly during exercises or games, and interactions that were related to the material or the topic. Didactic recasts were rarely given during interaction that was not related to the material or the topic. The teacher also provided didactic recasts in both partial and full form. Sheen (2011) defines partial and full recasts as the teacher's provision of recasts by reformulating only the erroneous part of the learner's utterance or the learner's whole utterance. Both partial and full didactic recasts were used to show the learners the location of the errors that they made (2011). One example of the teacher's didactic recasts can be seen from the underlined statement below:

Extract 1

T : you forget ... do you know? maybe ...  
       maybe you know something and then  
       maybe we can add the story so it  
       becomes a complete story (**laughter**)  
       what happened to suro and boyo?

L6 : they fight

T : oh they fought and then?

The oral CF in the extract is taken as a didactic recast because the teacher's focus was on the learner's grammatical accuracy although the teacher understood what the learner said. The learner used the wrong form of verb in relation to the tense; the learners should have used past tense to tell a past event. Therefore, the teacher

provided a didactic recast to show the correct form. This didactic recast is a full didactic recast because the teacher reformulated the whole utterance.

#### b) Conversational Recasts

A conversational recast is given when a teacher fails to understand what the learner is trying to say (Sheen and Ellis, 2011). It is said to be more implicit because it is given when there is a communication problem in understanding the speaker (or the learner) in such a way that the teacher usually reformulates the learner's utterance as how he or she intends to say (2011). Although it did not occur frequently, this type of recast still occurred in the classroom for both grammatical errors and lexical errors. One of the examples of the teacher's conversational recasts can be seen below:

Extract 2

L7: why other artists (2) said that mister Duchamp art (1) was not art?

T: okay why did the other artists say that Marcel Duchamp's art ... was ... not ... art ... like that?

L7: (nods)

The learner made a grammatical error in making a question. Due to the missing word 'did', the learner's utterance was not in the correct question form. Thus, the teacher tried to reformulate the learner's utterance like what she thought the learner was trying to say. This is included as a conversational recast because the aim of the teacher's correction was to understand the learner's utterance or the meaning.

## 2. Explicit Correction

Another type of oral CF strategies found in the conversation class is explicit correction. This type of correction is usually given by the teacher explicitly to guide the learners to the location of the error and supports learners with the correction of the error (Sheen and Ellis, 2011; Sheen, 2011). In the conversation class, explicit correction strategy was only given during exercises and games. The example of explicit correction in the conversation class is provided below:

Extract 3

L3: I will watch a tv

T: you will watch tv ... you cannot say watch  
A tv

This CF is included as explicit correction because the teacher repeated the learner's erroneous utterance and provided the correction at the same

time (e.g. it is A, not B). According to the teacher and learner's interaction in Extract 3, the learner made use of an incorrect article in her statement. When the learner had to complete a sentence, she added the article 'a' before the word 'TV', which changed the meaning of her statement. The teacher, then, explicitly told the learner that her utterance was wrong, and the teacher also provided the correction. Moreover, the teacher made it clear by putting more emphasis on the location of the error to the learner.

## 3. Explicit Correction with Metalinguistic Explanation

Explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation refers to a teacher's explicit indication of a learner's error along with the provision of the correction and metalinguistic explanation about the error (Sheen and Ellis, 2011; Sheen, 2011). What makes this type different from explicit correction only is the provision of metalinguistic information about the learners' errors. One short interaction in the conversation class is seen to be showing explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation CF strategy for a learner's lexical error:

Extract 4

L1: miss ... use both sides (of a piece of paper)  
*itu recy ... recycle?*

T: both ... it's reduce (3) it's like this ...  
reduce is like this ... if you need ... two  
pages but now you only use one page right  
this is reduce ... you need two pages for  
example to write uh ... two paragraphs but  
now you can use the first page and the  
second page that's reduce ... recycle ...  
recycle is like this...this is a piece of paper  
... how can you recycle it? ... you have to  
put it (**crushes a piece of paper**)  
[(laughter)]

Although, as it is seen in Extract 4, the teacher does not repeat the erroneous part (as in 'It is not A, but it is B'), which is one of the characteristics of explicit correction, the teacher provided the correction explicitly to the learner since what the learner said was already incorrect. The learner made an error in choosing the word 'reduce' for 'recycle'. After explicitly saying the correction, further explanation was also given by the teacher so that the learner can distinguish the difference between the two words. Therefore, the teacher's CF provision is taken as explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation where the teacher informs the learner with the correction and the explanation at the same time.

## Output-prompting CF

### 1. Clarification Requests

This type of oral CF strategies is usually implicit where it gives signal to the learner that the teacher does not understand his or her utterance (Sheen and Ellis, 2011; Sheen, 2011). This correction can be given through signals, for instance by saying things like “Sorry?” or “Pardon me?” for clarification (Sheen, 2011, p. 3). This type of oral CF was also found in the conversation class. The teacher uses this strategy for both grammatical and lexical errors. The example below is an example of clarification request done by the teacher for a grammatical error during a conversation related to the topic in the class:

Extract 5

T : hah? to help you ... build something yes ... what else? let me write down what tools can help you ... tools ... can ... (**writes on the board**) can what Lauren?

L5 : can be to ...

T : hah?=

L5 : =eh can help ... can help people=

The teacher’s utterance (i.e. hah?) is regarded as a clarification request because its purpose was to clarify the learner’s erroneous utterance and elicit correction from the learner. The learner made a grammatical error by saying ‘can be to’. A signal (i.e. ‘hah?’) was given in a question tone by the teacher to tell that something was wrong. Through the teacher’s signal, the learner realized that something was wrong and came up with the correction by herself.

### 2. Repetition

A repetition is one of oral CF strategies where a teacher repeats a learner’s utterance, including the error, without giving any clue or information about the error (Sheen and Ellis, 2011; Sheen, 2011). The aim of doing repetition is to get the learner’s attention and to encourage self-correction by the learner. Repetition found in the conversation class happened only during exercises or games in the classroom. A small part of the conversation class’ interaction below shows the teacher’s use of repetition:

Extract 6

L5 : doctors *sus* ... *susters*=

T : =*susters*?!

The extract above shows the teacher’s attempt in correcting a learner’s lexical error during a game by using elicitation. The learner mixed a word in her L1 (i.e. *suster* – an Indonesian word for nurse) and suffix –s for plural form in English. As a response, the teacher repeated the error.

### 3. Elicitation

An elicitation is considered as a teacher’s oral CF characterized by the use of a question to elicit correction from a learner (Sheen and Ellis, 2011; Sheen, 2011). It is also common that an elicitation usually comes along with the teacher’s partial repetition of the learner’s utterance in order to let the learner do the correction (Sheen, 2011). The elicitation strategy found in the conversation class occurred only during exercises and games for both grammatical errors and lexical errors of the learners. The writer provides an example of elicitation from the conversation class in this extract:

Extract 7

L6 : why why Marcel Duchamp ... the name is Marcel Duchamp?

LL : (**laughter**)

T : why ... can you fix your question please? why? (1)

An elicitation is seen from the extract. The teacher made use of question and partial repetition to elicit correction from the learner who made a grammatical error in creating a question. The teacher’s elicitation started with the teacher’s direct request to the learner to fix his utterance and repeated the word ‘why?’ from the learner’s previous utterance.

### 4. Metalinguistic Clue

This type of oral CF strategies is included as the one of those that prompts the output (i.e. correction) from the learner (Sheen and Ellis, 2011; Sheen, 2011). Metalinguistic clue is shown when a teacher provides metalinguistic explanation to the learner’s error without giving the correction (Sheen and Ellis, 2011; Sheen, 2011). An interaction during a classroom exercise in the following shows the teacher’s attempts to give CF to a learner and one of them is by providing metalinguistic clue:

Extract 8

L7 : why some artists said that (1) Marcel Duchamp’s work ... was not art? (1)

T : okay ... why ... was (1) why can you fix it ... the [question?] → Elicitation

L6 : [okay me] (**raises his hand**) why ... why Marcel Duchamp ... born in France?=  
LL : [(**laughter**)]

T : no I think ... I think his question is good ... but it’s not grammatically correct but Gaby do you understand the question?=  
→ **Metalinguistic clue**

The teacher’s CF is included as a metalinguistic clue because of the metalinguistic information that

the teacher gave as a hint for the learner's error. The learner (L7) made a grammatical error in making his question. He got jumbled up with his words, which made his question grammatically incorrect. The learner missed the word 'did' in order to make a proper interrogative sentence in past tense. Thus, the teacher provided a meta-linguistic clue to give an explicit signal that something is incorrect and it was a grammatical error.

In correcting the learners' errors, the teacher of the conversation class applied oral CF strategies to improve the learners' English and also taking the learners' affect into consideration. The teacher's action in providing the CF where she applied recast more often compared to the other CF strategies proves this. Recasts did not directly point the learners' errors. Without directly pointing out the errors, this was a safer way to correct sensitive learners. The learners were sensitive due to their early teenage years. According to the result of the interview, the learners in the intermediate conversation class was said to be not really active in talking, especially in English. If their mistakes were directly corrected in front of their classmates, they might speak less than usual. Thus, considerations on how to correct the learners' errors as well as not offending the learners were important for the teacher. On the other hand, an understanding of each of the learners' characteristics was also shown during the interview. An example was given by the teacher to show a comparison of two of her learners who had different characteristics. Learner A was said to be active in the class and cooperative in accepting the CF from the teacher, while learner B was taciturn and highly sensitive to CF to the point that learner B might not want to speak when CF was given by the teacher. Therefore, it is seen that the teacher would have more options in giving oral CF to learner A's errors compared to learner B's. Based on the classroom recordings, various oral CF strategies, including both input-providing and output-prompting oral CF strategies were given to learner A, while learner B was given recast. This point shows that oral CF was given to the learners with considerations, not just correcting the errors.

In correcting the learners' errors, the teacher also considered more on the learners' grammatical aspect than the vocabulary. According to the result of the interview, the importance of having good grammatical accuracy in speaking English was expressed by the teacher. The teacher believed that good grammatical accuracy showed how someone

was well educated. Thus, this led the teacher to correct most of the learners' grammatical errors in the conversation class. It is also proven by the findings found in the classroom; most oral CF strategies were more motivated by the learners' grammatical errors than the lexical errors. Another point about this is still related to the learners' characteristics and learning styles. The learners of the conversation class were said to be mostly passive and rarely conversed in English on their own; in fact, the teacher was the one who dominated the communication in the classroom, for instance giving instruction and asking questions. The teacher herself also confirmed this during the interview. She discussed on how hard it was to make all the learners active in the conversation class; most of the time learners did not really give respond to the teacher. Thus, correcting the errors in the learners' utterances became the focus of the teacher rather than developing the flow of the conversation in the class. Therefore, the teacher ended up trying to remind the learners on their grammatical errors through the use of oral CF strategies although it was a conversation class.

## CONCLUSION

Through this study, the writer was able to see the teacher's oral CF provision in the intermediate conversation class. The writer saw the teacher's preference in providing various oral CF strategies in the conversation class, in which more input-providing strategies were given for grammatical errors and more output-prompting strategies for lexical errors. The teacher's belief in the learners' moderate level of grammar had led the teacher to use input-providing CF for grammatical errors to remind the learners directly of the correct form. On the other hand, the learners' lexical use was treated with output-prompting strategies to let the learners explore the vocabulary for their speaking.

Next, the writer found that the teacher had made use of various oral CF strategies in her class; however, the teacher's use of oral CF strategies was not always efficient and effective. It was because the teacher chose to correct most of the learners' errors, including the same errors made repetitively in the class. There were times when the teacher repeated a CF strategy for the same error made by different learners. The teacher provided CF after the learners finished their speech. Instead, the teacher could make use of some of the class time to discuss about the major errors together with the learners to avoid repetition of the same error and CF strategy. Therefore, the writer

realizes that the teacher's oral CF strategies were not always effective.

Third, the writer saw the teacher's supportiveness in facilitating oral CF for her learners. This was seen through the teacher's considerations on the learners (e.g. considering the learners' characteristics, learning styles, error, and age) and oral CF provision in the class. The teacher had proven this point by providing different CF strategies for different kinds of learners (e.g. responsive vs. sensitive learners). The result of the interview also unfolded the teacher's tendency to be cautious in giving corrections due to the learners' early teenage age, especially for less severe errors during talks that were not related to the material or the topic being discussed in order not to discourage the learners to speak English. Instead of correcting every single error, the teacher tended to choose the time to correct the learners' errors, for instance by providing CF during activities like games that was seen to be more useful since the learners would be more relaxed and able to get corrected for their errors.

Lastly, the writer found that most of the teacher's oral CF strategies in the classroom were aimed for the learners' grammatical accuracy. Although the learners had fewer problems in conveying their meaning, the teacher provided oral CF and focused more on the learners' form and language use in the conversation class. An emphasis on grammatical accuracy was also found in the interview. The writer, thus, saw this as the most probable reason for the teacher's oral CF provision for the learners' grammatical errors even though the main focus of the conversation class was to let the learners speak English comfortably.

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